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Making History:
Rhetoric, Historiography, and the Television News Media

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
WITH A MAJOR IN RHETORIC, COMPOSITION, AND THE TEACHING OF
ENGLISH

In the Graduate College

The University of Arizona

2001
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA ®
GRADUATE COLLEGE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I begin by thanking my parents, Jerry and Helen, who convinced me to go to college in the first place—although they never dreamed I would stay so long. Their unconditional love and support made this work—and all the work leading up to it, and all the work that will follow—possible. The same is true for my wife Elizabeth, who met me less than a month before I defended my thesis on Norman Maclean and married me less than a month before I began work on my PhD. Her faith in me has never wavered, and I am a better man because of her presence in my life.

The ideas in this dissertation owe their development to the influence of many people: Theresa Enos worked with me from my first semester in Arizona, guiding my ideas and encouraging my explorations inside and outside of the English Department. The years I have spent as her coauthor and associate editor have made me the professional I am. Tom Miller pushed me to consider my ideas in more critical, historically-minded ways—no matter how annoyed those ideas sometimes left him. Ed White guided me to my first publication in a major journal and, later, guided me through the turbulent academic job search. Along the way he read countless pages of my work, shared his hunger for Thai and Indian food, and became a much-loved friend—though it is unlikely he will loan me his car again. And thanks must go to Tilly Wamock, who showed me that it is possible to be married, be a scholar, be a teacher, be a writer, be an administrator, and be happy all at the same time—and who taught me that all projects must, eventually, be considered parked.

I must also thank the people who have become my second family through shared experience and mutual respect. Darin Payne stood beside me at my wedding, sat beside me in countless classes, drove with me from Spokane to Tucson, and, along the way, became one of my best friends. I owe much of what I am and will be to him, although we may disagree about the cultural value of Mack Bolan and "them movie books." Donald McNutt, over more than a few hillbilly beers, graciously listened to my ideas about the influence of the past upon the present, the symbolism of the red door in American Beauty, and the character of Vern Schillinger on OZ, even after we weren't allowed to play anymore. Daphne Desser taught me to prepare for comprehensive exams, write an abstract, and plan a surprise party—an endeavor where we both learned a lesson about the difficulty of keeping even small secrets.

And Dana Elder, who once spent an hour teaching me to place a comma correctly with a coordinating conjunction. Dana Elder, who taught me most of what I know about the history of rhetoric and the profession of composition. Dana Elder, who showed me the value of a dialogic classroom—and of having a life outside of that classroom. Dana Elder, who listens to my ideas and asks the questions I have yet to consider. My friend Dana Elder, who continues to teach me that all of this is about finding your eudaimonia. Thank you.
DEDICATION

To my wife, Elizabeth, who never stopped asking how this work was going. And who
still hasn’t received a clear answer.
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on work in communications, media studies, and history, I argue that the historiographical methods of rhetoric and composition need to move beyond written discourse to consider the use of visual historical representations of the past. To explicate my argument, I analyze multiple examples of local and national television news coverage of the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the recent fighting in Kosovo. Based upon these examples, I argue that the television news media work within a dysfunctional, narrative-driven genre that is entirely inadequate in its attempts to analyze current world events, particularly warfare, because of heavy reliance upon culturally recognizable images of the past drawn from both fictional and non-fictional sources.

Ultimately, my argument demonstrates the need for a critical methodology in rhetoric and composition for examining texts that are visual—such as photographs, video tapes, and multimedia documents on the Web. I begin with an examination of the history and historiography of rhetoric and composition. Using Susan Jarratt's *Rereading the Sophists* as an extended example, I analyze how history is both written and critiqued in this field—drawing heavily on such sources as *Rhetoric Review*’s Octalogs and the work of James Berlin, Thomas P. Miller, and Robert J. Connors. To move the historiographical methods into the analysis of visual history, I draw on the work of a wide range of scholars in communications, media studies, and history: Walter Lippmann, Thomas E. Patterson, W. Lance Bennett, Noam Chomsky, Jean Baudrillard, H. Bruce Franklin, and others.
After applying the methodology I develop to several texts—from both television and the Web—I extend my arguments beyond historiography to American culture. I argue that the ways in which the past is constructed have direct consequences for the ways in which Americans understand the past and present. Specifically, superficial constructions of history limit the ability of viewers/readers to think critically about the past and thus limit the complexity of arguments on which decisions in the present can be based. In this sense, visual history is an example of deliberative rhetoric limited by the constraints under which forensic rhetoric is constructed.
I was raised by both my extended family and American popular culture to think of the history of American warfare in nearly religious terms. The men around me when I was very young were nearly all veterans of World War II, and to this day I remember the stories they told: Jay and Jack were both in the Normandy invasion, and Jack, a Screaming Eagle, went on to fight at Bastogne. Their brother June was in MacArthur's army in the Pacific, and he survived the Bataan Death March and long-captivity by the Japanese. Walter was the navigator and on a bomber shot down over the Reich; the sole-survivor, he spent eighteen months as a prisoner of war (POW) in Germany. Later he fought in Korea. John B. was in the Navy, stationed aboard the Cassin and on watch the morning of December 7, 1941. From Pearl Harbor he went on to serve in the Aleutian Islands, the liberation of the Phillipines, and the taking of both Wake and Okinawa. Like Walter, he later fought in Korea. John G. was a Marine who carried a flamethrower ashore on dozens of heavily-defended Pacific atolls.

These men surrounded me when I was a child, ever-present at family gatherings and holiday celebrations. Their history suffused my childhood with images of patriotism and sacrifice, with the understanding that they had all taken part in something monumental. From them I learned about the Greatest Generation long before I ever heard the term. At the same time that I saw World War II through my family, I saw images of the Vietnam War developed on movie screens.
American culture during my youth was obsessed with imaging the Vietnam War, and I consumed all of this imagery without question, probably because my understanding of various films was heavily mediated by my predetermined understanding of warfare itself. The POW was featured heavily in the films I remember best; *The Deer Hunter* is the first Vietnam-related film I saw in a theatre. This was my initial exposure to the Vietnam POW as a hero, a figure standing proud and strong before the malevolent North Vietnamese communists. In a flashback early in *First Blood*, I saw John Rambo tortured by these same Vietnamese—and saw Rambo bring fire and thunder down on the small town sheriff who played the part of the Vietnamese in this reframing of the POW escape-narrative. Rambo, in the sequel to his first adventure, returned to Vietnam itself to liberate Americans who had never been accounted for at war's end. I saw *First Blood* many times on video tape; it was a favorite of my social group. I saw *Rambo: First Blood II* at least twice in the theatre.

Return-to-Vietnam narratives stand out the most in my memory. *Uncommon Valor* was another favorite, as were the *MIA* films starring Chuck Norris. At the same time that my friends and I were watching the Vietnam War on film, we were reading about it, too. We read of *The Executioner* and his return to Vietnam to rescue live POWs. We read of *Able Team, Phoenix Force*, and the adventures of the *MIA Hunter*. Looking back, I know that we believed all of what we saw and read. I never doubted that there were live POWs in southeast Asia or that US involvement in Vietnam had been worth the cost. And when the Gulf War began, I was primed to be manipulated.
I supported war in the Gulf months before the shooting ever started. In large part, my initial support existed because of my friends, all of whom had gone into the military upon our graduation from Anaconda High School, and all of whom were sent to Saudi Arabia in the last months of 1990: Todd and Chuck were in the Army, both stationed near the border of Kuwait, along with Steve and Sean. Rob was in the Army, too, but he drove gas trucks rather than marching with the infantry. Jesse was in the Marines, practicing amphibious landings as part of Operation Imminent Thunder; he would later be stationed in Haiti, Yugoslavia, and Somalia. Joe was in the Navy, serving aboard the USS Enterprise. I was in contact with all of them, either directly or through their families, and I never questioned the official US policies that led to their deployment.

My support for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm was predetermined. I grew up around veterans; my friends and I were deluged by images of righteous American warfare in Vietnam. I supported the troops in the Gulf, and argued vehemently that such support was their due, regardless of underlying motives the nation may have for putting them in harm's way. I tied a yellow ribbon on my car's radio antennae, and on the doorknob of my home. I shook my head in confusion at those who protested the war, and I closed my ears to their arguments.

I believed in the righteousness of the allied cause. The first work I ever published came at this time, in fact: a poem titled "Cold Warrior" that praised, without naming him, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and his nearly-pathological distrust of the Russians. Now, more than a decade after the Gulf War's end, I feel slightly embarrassed, for I was duped. The US military used the media to craft a message I was primed to
receive, a message that reframed the Vietnam War and drew upon all of the mythic
images I learned from my family and from the films I had seen. I was a true-believe in
the cult of militarism and interventionism, and my faith was absolute.

My interest in history, particularly the history of American warfare, is built upon
these experiences from my youth, experiences of the past involving family, film,
deliberate manipulation by the militarily controlled media, and unintentional
manipulation by the forces of culture and ideology. This dissertation rises from the ever-
evolving understanding I have developed of the socially constructed nature of both the
past and present, especially in regards to the American news media. All of this puts me
in a unique position to analyze the manner in which the Vietnam War is being
constructed to serve present needs.

In his introductory remarks to the *Life of Jesus*, Ernest Renan argues that

To write the history of a religion, it is necessary to have believed it
(otherwise we should not be able to understand how it has charmed and
satisfied the human conscience); in the second place, to believe it no
longer, for absolute faith is incompatible with sincere history.

(qtd. in Bainton ix-x)

While Renan was speaking of the profession of the historian, and promoting a heavily-
romanticized biography of Christ, his statement accurately characterizes my own work in
this dissertation. American belief in particular interpretations of the Vietnam War and its
meaning for the present border on religious fervor. Certain images and narratives are
considered to be dogma; they are placed above question and beyond reproach, and they
moderate discussions of present conditions in the world. Analyzing these constructions is the work of this dissertation.

In chapter one I explore the foundations of my understanding regarding history as it is currently written. Specifically, I focus on the argument that history is often expressed as a narrative—a chronologically organized sequence of events with a clear beginning, middle, and end—and that narrative is a form of argument. I begin by describing my work in the writing classroom and work through definitions of both *history* and *narrative*. Originally, this focus on history as narrative-argument was the focus of my dissertation, for I began my research expecting to have to prove this point within a field of research that denies it. This belief quickly evaporated. The understanding that history is generally viewed as a narrative and is thus restricted by the narrative patterns that have developed in this culture is common in the fields of History and English. I expected to have to argue this point, but I found that it had already been conclusively proved.

Chapter two begins the development of my argument: The historiographical methods developed in rhetoric and composition are neither designed for nor capable of analyzing visual representations of the past. To advance this argument I analyze Susan Jarratt's *Rereading the Sophists* as an example of how history is written in this field—and then examine a few of the ways in which Jarratt's work is critiqued. From this summative analysis, my argument moves to an analysis of visual history, beginning with photographs and moving through film and televisual pictures of the past. Ultimately, I argue that the historiography of rhetoric and composition must develop a greater
awareness of the industrial complex that produces the images Americans consume, particularly on television, and an awareness of the conventions of the visual communicative medium itself.

I begin chapter three with an analysis of an advertisement for AT&T wherein the Vietnam War is constructed to support the argument that AT&T facilitates inter-generational communication. From this analysis, I develop my critical frame specifically for analyzing the television news media, drawing heavily on the work of Walter Lippmann, Thomas E. Patterson, and W. Lance Bennett, arguing that the news as it currently exists is overly-personalized, dramatized, and fragmented. I end the chapter with an analysis of coverage of the Kosovo Crisis in 1999 from the local Tucson ABC affiliate, KGUN-9.

In chapter four I analyze the construction and maintenance of two myths of the Vietnam War: the belief in live POWs and in the prevalence of dioxin poisoning in veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. More specifically, I analyze the ways in which both of these myths are reimaged in American culture, the ways in which they are transformed into their opposites. In my analysis, I demonstrate how soldiers listed as KIA/BNR (Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered) are transformed into live POWs who languish in captivity to this day; I also show, through analysis of a report from ABC News, how the issue of Agent Orange poisoning is shifted so that it focuses on the people of Vietnam and effaces the American veterans almost entirely.

Like chapter one, chapter five focuses, in part, on the writing classroom. I argue that while computers, which are present in only about half of all American homes, have
radically transformed the teaching of writing, the television, which has been present in nearly every American home for the past forty years, is given short shrift. I also analyze several current composition textbooks to demonstrate how visual rhetoric is being treated in English classes at the undergraduate level and make recommendations about how such work can be further meaningfully developed. I briefly discuss the texts that would be appropriate for a graduate-level course on the rhetoric of the television news media and end with a call for future research, particularly in relation to the construction of the English teacher in American culture and of the past on the World Wide Web.

The first three appendices contain full transcripts of the televisual texts analyzed in chapters three and four of this dissertation (summarized below). Appendix A covers the AT&T commercial analyzed in chapter three; appendix B covers the KGUN-9 news report on Kosovo, also from chapter three. Appendix C is the transcript of a report on Agent Orange from the ABC Nightly News, analyzed in chapter four. Throughout this dissertation I build my argument upon the analysis of these examples. Much of this analysis follows a narrative form, for a foundation of my argument is that only through narration is reality knowable. Below, I briefly summarize each analysis and its place in my overall argument about history, the media, and the uses of the past.

In chapter three I analyze my first extended example: a commercial for AT&T originally aired on The Learning Channel during the premier of a series of documentaries about the Vietnam War (appendix A). In this commercial, a narrative is constructed almost entirely through images closely associated with American memories of Vietnam: A young man travels through the Vietnamese countryside, up rivers and through villages.
He calls his father, a Vietnam veteran, and they bond over the telephone, presumably discussing the father's traumatic past as a soldier. The narrative is built upon association and inference. The audience is told that the boy's father "was here" and that he did not talk about his experiences very much. Audiences fill in the rest. This commercial is only possible because of the prevalence of a shared view of the past, specifically of the Vietnam War. Only an audience steeped in the images of films such as *Apocalypse Now* and stories of veterans who remained silent about their wartime experiences can make meaning of this text in the way that AT&T intends.

My second example, the "Comparisons" report on the fighting in Kosovo, fits a similar mold (appendix B). An audience primed to understand Vietnam as a war populated by young men—such as the then-nineteen subject of this report, Denny Evans—can immediately connect with the comparisons the report is making. The audience is reminded of how tough the Vietnamese soldiers were, of the inadvisability of fighting in another nation's "backyard," and the ineffective bombing that characterized most of the war in Vietnam. Each of these brief examples touches upon an already established piece of the Vietnam narrative in America, including the introductory remarks by the news anchor that this was a war that America "fought and lost." The report is fragmented, providing neither a clear picture of the past nor of the present; instead it provides a picture of the present and possible future that is entirely mediated through a superficial interpretation of the past. The superficiality of this historical perspective is further heightened by its personalization, by its focus on a single veteran whose primary role in the story seems to be to look at old pictures and cry. The bathos of these images
dramatizes the comparisons that are being made, drawing attention away from the superficiality of them and focusing, instead, on the cultural figure of the damaged veteran, the unsung hero haunted by his past—a past immediately knowable to an audience for whom that past and its meaning are already predetermined.

In chapter four I analyze a report from ABC News on Agent Orange. Like the two previous examples, this report functions by drawing upon common imagery from the Vietnam War; in this case, images of US warplanes spraying defoliant on the jungles of Vietnam are shown over and over again. Unlike the earlier examples, though, this report uses these images to demonstrate the prevalence of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War while not focusing on the physical damage exposure to this toxin may have had on American soldiers, a common theme in post-Vietnam America. Instead, the images are separated by wrenching pictures of Vietnamese children who have, it is argued, been handicapped by the dioxin that has seeped into their environment, dioxin from Agent Orange, specifically. The devastated Vietnamese countryside is only briefly shown in this story, and the controversy raised by disabled American veterans is never discussed at all. Only the children of Vietnam are shown. In this way, the issue of Agent Orange is reimagined, turned into its opposite. Rather than being an issue about US soldiers and a government’s mistake, the issue becomes focused on the Vietnamese themselves, personified in the figures of children. Because it effaces the US veterans, the report is fragmented from the history of Agent Orange, existing in a rhetorical space that is all about the Vietnamese who were exposed to dioxin and never about the Americans. The report is also dramatized: the US ambassador to Vietnam denies Agent Orange is
responsible for the children’s handicaps and the American Legion argues that it would take a more friendly stance towards the Vietnamese complaints if a full-accounting is made of all of the US soldiers still listed as Missing in Action. By isolating itself from the Americans who claim to suffer from dioxin poisoning and focusing, albeit briefly, on the MIA issue, this report ends up being as superficial and limited as “Comparisons.”

The kind of reimaging of Vietnam seen in the report on Agent Orange occurs in photographs, film, and on the television news. But it also takes place in television dramas. Because the reimaging of the Vietnam War is a central concern of this dissertation, I conclude this introduction with a brief example of this reimaging from one of the most popular programs currently on television: The West Wing.

An episode of the NBC program The West Wing, first aired in February of 2001, exemplifies America’s still-common compulsion to reimage Vietnam. Near the end of a plotline involving American hostages held in some un-named South American country, a failed rescue attempt that resulted in nine American deaths, and the threat of massive military force being brought to bear (all narratives well-known to Americans who watched the Iran Hostages’ story unfold for 444 days in the late 1970s and early 1980s), the President, played by actor Martin Sheen, engages in a conversation with his Chief of Staff (actor John Spencer) who argues against a military solution to the ongoing problem:

I fought a jungle war. I’m not doing it again. If I could put myself anywhere in time, it would be the Cabinet Room on August 4th, 1964, when our ships were attacked by North Vietnam in the Tonkin Gulf. I’d say, “Mr. President, don’t do it. You’re considering authorizing a massive
commitment of troops and throwing in our lot with torturers and
panderers, leaders without principle and soldiers without conviction—with
no clear mission and no end in sight.”

Until now, the focus of this episode, appropriately titled “The War at Home,” has been on
the failed US efforts at curbing the drug trade. Now the focus shifts from the current war
on drugs to the past, to Vietnam.

As in the ABC News report on Agent Orange, this scene is a reimagining—in this
case, a reimagining of the issue of American involvement in Vietnam. In this reimagining,
America makes the “right” decision and avoids a costly mistake, saving the lives of
nearly 60,000 soldiers—and saving American face. As it reimages Vietnam, this scene
also makes an argument concerning US drug policy, which currently aligns US interests
with the official governments of many Central and South American nations. Here, these
governments, officially allies of the United States, are reimagined as “torturers and
panderers, leaders without principle and soldiers without conviction.” This comparison
between current US involvement in the drug wars and involvement in the Vietnam War is
reinforced by the final scene of the episode, where the President stands over the flag-
draped coffins of American soldiers slain by the guerilla forces of a drug lord. The
argument in these scenes is clear: mistaken US involvement in fighting the drug wars is
as large and, potentially, as costly as US involvement in Vietnam.

In the end, all four of these examples—from AT&T to The West Wing—image (or
reimage) Vietnam to suit their own purpose, whether that purpose is concerned with
economics, information, or entertainment. They support the master narrative of America
and Vietnam, a narrative of fragmentation, suffering, death, dishonesty, and trauma. These analyses, and the critical apparatus such analyses demand, are the focus of the work that follows.

In the end, the work of this dissertation is ambitious. Drawing on scholarship from the fields of History, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Journalism, and Rhetoric and Composition, I begin to develop a critical framework capable of analyzing the visual constructions of the past that exist on television, particularly on the television news. I make suggestions about both composition pedagogy and research. I draw on a large body of work from multiple disciplines and develop it in a way appropriate for scholars in my field. Throughout this dissertation I also play the role of former believer. I examine the myths of the past that I believed in when I was young and still, sometimes, put faith in as an adult. I challenge the manner in which these myths are employed by television journalists to explain the present—creating explanations that limit critical deliberations about the meaning of the past and of future courses of action.
HISTORY, NARRATIVE, AND THE FOUNDATION OF AN ARGUMENT

When I began teaching at The University of Arizona in 1996, I focused my composition classes (both introductory and advanced) on a large number of historical texts dealing with the Vietnam War—and by historical texts I mean anything from poetry and fiction to oral history and creative nonfiction. In this historically-oriented environment, I was immediately confronted by a rather daunting problem: The students were largely ignorant of the past. This problem seemed to exist on two levels. On the most basic level, the students simply did not know many names, dates, places, and other minutiae of history—the anchors to which new knowledge could be attached. Unfortunately, they also had a false sense of what they did know. They knew some things about the American war in Vietnam from their studies in high school and college, from various television programs, and from movies such as *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Missing in Action*. But all of these sources of information came together to produce a view of the past that David Lowenthal describes as “largely chaotic and episodic, a hodgepodge of chronologically unknown or mistakenly connected figures and events” (220). Many of the students had a basic understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder, for example, and they used this to understand anything written by a veteran.

More significantly, my students seemed to have no productive way of thinking about the past, no workable critical frame that could be brought to bear on the historical texts we were studying. My first instinct was to teach history, to deliver mini-lectures on pertinent topics. I did some of this, but its success was only moderate. A more
successful strategy, and one that allows me to draw on my strengths as a rhetorician rather than highlight my weaknesses as an historian, is to teach historical texts as arguments. Specifically, the focus of my course became this idea: History is an argument about the past used to explain the present and to argue for future courses of action. Initially this definition seemed to solve my pedagogical problems. The class was focused on argumentation, and we were reading a large number of texts about the Vietnam War. So we analyzed them as arguments. As we analyzed more texts, this approach became progressively more complicated. To make sense of what we were doing, the students and I developed a graphical representation of the work we were studying (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1, Graphical representation of historical texts](image)

On the graphic the students and I developed, the historical event being discussed is situated on the left. As the arrow, which represents the flow of time, moves further and further from the original event, the texts become more beholden to one another. At the left end of the arrow, the witnesses and participants to a given event are the primary
source of information. At the right end, the records left by those witnesses and participants are the primary source—and are influenced by all of the secondary sources that appear across time. Thus from left to right, the graphic shows the movement from an event through the primary sources to the secondary sources, and, ultimately, the appearance of tertiary sources.

In some important ways, the graphical representation is reductive. It suggests a linear progression, for example, that is false. The movement from primary to secondary and tertiary texts is recursive, cyclical. New documentaries and histories are often as indebted to primary sources as they are to the histories/documentaries that developed from them. In terms of the Vietnam War, for example, military veterans have exerted influence upon textual representations of the war since the very beginning—and are still the focus of the lion’s share of work produced about the Vietnam War. The graphic also fails to account for the cultural forces at work on each of the texts it places. As witnesses narrate their interpretations and impressions of an event, they are influenced by the cultural norms governing their interpretations. Thus a narrative about battle, for example, must conform to a relatively standardized pattern for narration—with rising action, a climax, and a denouement. But the graphic, despite its flaws, gave us a place to start, a foundation on which to build arguments and analyses of increasing complexity.

As I worked with those first-year composition students to understand the various textual representations of the Vietnam War, two very important questions developed over the course of the semester: (1) What is History and what does it mean to write it? (2)
How can History, especially in narrative form, function as an argument? Although I had no way of knowing it at the time, these questions would lead directly to this dissertation.

In this chapter I explore the answers to the two questions raised above. Originally I conceived of this as an argument rather than a summative exploration—an argument that history was a narrative and that narrative was itself a form of argumentation. I now view this position as foundational; Hayden White, Walter Fisher, Edward Hallett Carr, and others have conclusively proven that history, in the West, is commonly understood as a narrative, a story about what happened in the past and what it means today. In chapter two I summarize the historiographical methods that have developed in the field of rhetoric and composition and argue that those methods must draw on other disciplines to analyze the visual history that is created and used on television, especially by the news media. Chapter three contains two analyses, applications of the extended method I advocate in chapter two. The first analysis is of an AT&T commercial; the second is of a segment from a local ABC news affiliate. Both make use of similar patterns of narration and familiar images from the Vietnam War to advance their arguments. Chapter four advances my analysis of the news media further, focusing on two mythological images that have arisen from American involvement in Vietnam: the figures of the Prisoner of War and of the military veteran psychologically damaged by battle and physically poisoned by exposure to dioxin in the defoliant Agent Orange. In chapter five I conclude by analyzing several first-year composition texts that attempt to foreground the analysis of visual texts. I also suggest ways in which the field of rhetoric and composition can include education in visual texts and the news media in graduate education.
History as Narrative and Argument: Definitions and Conventions of the Genre

Rather than attempt to define a problematic term such as *history*, which could refer to either the past itself or to the record of the past, I focus here on defining the conventions of the genre of historical writing. Before turning to these conventions, then, a definition of genre must also be advanced. David A. Jolliffe writes that a genre is a "type of spoken or written discourse, recognized as conventional by members of an intellectual community, that draws together certain substantive and stylistic features in response to a recurrent rhetorical situation" (279). This definition of *genre* is similar to that advanced by Sonja K. Foss, who argues that for a genre to exist, situational requirements, substantive and stylistic characteristics, and a common pattern of organization must all be present. "[W]hat is distinctive about a genre of rhetoric," she writes, "is the recurrence of the forms together, unified by the same organizing principle" (226). For both Jolliffe and Foss, a genre exists whenever similar situations elicit similar responses by members of a community; such definitions are complicated by Carolyn R. Miller, who argues that consideration of a genre "must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). This is an aspect of the genre of historical representation to which I will turn in later chapters, particularly as it applies to the television news media. For now, I focus on the form, content, and style of historical writing.

As I am using the term here, *history* refers to the explication/explanation of events predating the present (in a linear conception of time), written in a narrative pattern often...
built upon issues of cause and effect. This is the practice of the historian; this is the genre of historical writing. To provide further definition of history, I focus first upon a debate that took place in 1991 in the pages of *Past and Present*. The debate concerned the nature and purpose of history in a fragmented world, especially in relation to the work of postmodernists. For example, one postmodern challenge to the field of history concerns the concept of linear time. As Richard Evans explains in *In Defense of History*, “Drawing on Einsteinian physics, many postmodernists are skeptical of the notion of time as even and regulated; in political terms, they see such a view of time as oppressive and controlling, legitimating hegemonic discourse and privileging Western ways of viewing the world over non-Western” (121). Without a linear concept of time, the writing of history becomes difficult; causation cannot be discussed if one event cannot be argued to have preceded another.

A second challenge from postmodernism argues that any interpretation of past events is impossible; therefore, historians should confine their studies to the examination of unrelated and isolated historical bits of information. Such a move would, Evans argues, cut historical research “loose from any kind of context [and abandon] the attempt to relate empirical studies to broader grand narratives,” leaving history as a “new antiquarianism that few would be interested in pursuing and fewer still in reading” (201). As with the challenge to linear notions of time, the postmodern assault on interpretations stabs into the very heart of historical studies. Stripped of interpretation, most histories become a rambling collection of information of questionable value. In the sometimes-heated back and forth between several historians in *Past and Present* over these
postmodern challenges, definitions and assumptions about the field of History and its project emerge.

In his note that begins the argument, titled "History and Post-Modernism," Lawrence Stone argues that "During the last twenty-five years, the subject matter of history—that is events and behaviour—and the data—that is contemporary texts—and the problem—that is explanation of change over time—have all been brought seriously into question, thus throwing the profession [of history] . . . into a crisis of self-confidence about what it is doing and how it is doing it" (217). History is focused on human behavior as it is know through textual representations problematized by changes in human behavior. This is, clearly, a narrow approach to the subject. It is an approach for which Stone is taken to task.

Responding to Stone’s note, and especially to his statement concerning the subject and data of history, Patrick Joyce argues that

we may posit a dualism between the “real”, or the “social”, and representations of it. The “real” can be said to exist independently of our representations of it, and to affect those representations. But this effect is always discursive, and it must be insisted that history is never present to us in anything but a discursive form, here taking “discursive”, of course, to denote all forms of communication [. . .] (208)

For Joyce the relationship between Stone’s “contemporary texts” and the “human behaviour” they represent is far more complex than Stone allows. But Joyce refuses to wallow in the “banality” and “circularity” inherent in the dualism he sees. He argues,
without elaboration, that historians must begin "thinking about new versions of the social, ones that require historians to be the inquisitors and perhaps the executioners of old valuations [..., for] new kinds of history are now on the agenda" (209). Joyce places Stone with the old guard, defending the battlements of academe against the postmodern hoard. But he is unwilling to place himself either upon the walls or before them.

Following Joyce, Catriona Kelly argues that "the debate ... is about whether it is of greater value to read through texts towards something else, or to look at them [as isolated artifacts of a semiotically constructed past]" (209). To elaborate on her position, Kelly uses an extended example: the history of women. Further complicating the link between text and context, she argues that historians must possess "a considerable sensitivity to negative relations [... and that] an aggressive attitude may have to be adopted to the sources themselves, concentrating not on the most obvious interpretation, but on secondary layers of meaning" (212). Unlike Stone, and perhaps even Joyce, Kelly sees historians reading against the grain when they explore their sources. As Stone is constructed in his short text at the beginning of this debate—and reconstructed in the much longer responses to it—he is a believer in empirical absolutism and the unshakable authority of primary texts.

Continuing the debate in a later issue of Past and Present, Stone responds to his critics. He writes, "I am sorry that Patrick Joyce is so cross with me. [... But] we part company ... at the extreme stage, when reality is defined purely as language. This is because if there is nothing outside the text, then history ... collapses altogether, and fact and fiction become indistinguishable from one another" (189-90). Stone celebrates the
attention to the covert messages—along with the overt messages—within texts that postmodernism promotes. But he has problems with such approaches when they go too far, denying any discussion of either author or intent, for example, or "when [postmodernists] declare not that truth is unknowable, but that there is no reality out there which is anything but a subjective creation of the historian" (191, 193). Summarizing his position between modernism and postmodernism, and arguing about the profession of the historian, Stone asserts that

a text is merely a passive agent in the hands of its author. It is human beings who play with words; words don't play with themselves. To establish their meaning, we historians therefore need to search for the authorial intention; to study the social and political context which created the contemporary form of language; and to steep ourselves in the traditions of the culture. By these historical means, we will be able to recapture a provisional truth, at least sufficiently plausible to command assent for a while from most well-informed readers. (192)

The debate over meaning in events past is more complex than the above-cited sources suggest. To illuminate this complexity, I turn again to the historians, the distinctions they draw, and the definitions they propose, beginning with a complication of the concept of facts.

Edward Hallett Carr offers this distinction between what he calls the facts of history and the facts of the past: The facts of history are those ideas or pieces of information proposed by one historian and picked up on by others over the course of
time; thus the facts of history find their way into the commonly sanctioned narrative of the culture. Conversely, the facts of the past are those items proposed by one historian that ultimately fade into obscurity, championed by no one but their originator (10-11). In Carr’s schema, then, a narrative, which Cicero defined as “an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred,” of the past which contains information that is agreed upon by experts to be accurate comprises the historical record that is commonly considered to be true (1.19.27). (I should note that I do not make any distinctions between narrative and story. Both refer to an exposition of events presumed to be true. Also, my use of Cicero to define narrative serves, for now, purely as a reference point. A longer discussion of the nature of narration appears later in this introduction.)

For Carr, the narratives of the past are those narratives outside the dominant discourse, narratives relegated to the margins of the historical narration sanctioned by the larger culture, the local narratives subjugated by the master narrative. In terms of the US history of the Vietnam War, for example, such devalued narratives include the stories of Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, and women. The official narrative of the Vietnam War for Americans has, until very recently, been a narrative based upon the White, middle-class/working-class, infantryman’s experience—with movies like Platoon and Full Metal Jacket, and books like The Things They Carried (by Tim O’Brien) and In Pharaoh’s Army (by Tobias Wolff) normalizing this narrative. Other narratives have appeared, like Francisco Javier Munguia’s narrative Un Mexicano en Vietnam, but such stories have, thus far, been relegated to the past rather than being admitted into history.
Their narratives have been local, excluded from the master narrative of the history of the war.

As he offers these definitions of the past and history, Carr also recognizes their shortcomings and potential complications, especially with regard to the historians themselves—and the historians of the modern period in particular. Of their dilemma he writes,

When I am tempted, as I sometimes am, to envy the extreme competence of colleagues engaged in writing ancient or mediaeval history, I find consolation in the reflexion that they are so competent mainly because they are so ignorant of their subject [because all of the known facts are already facts of history by default, and there are no facts of the past to be concerned with]. The modern historian enjoys none of the advantages of this built-in ignorance. He must cultivate this necessary ignorance for himself—the more so the nearer he comes to his own times. He has the dual task of discovering the few significant facts and turning them into facts of history, and of discarding the many insignificant facts [of the past] as unhistorical. (13-14)

The historians of the modern period, unlike their colleagues who focus on antiquity, are temporally close enough to their subject to see many competing facts about a given situation; they must decide which are important and which are not. For Carr this is a difficult, but manageable, task.
Placement near the subject of study complicates the work historians do, for "the use of language forbids [them] to be neutral" when choosing which facts to present, and "the most effective way to influence opinion is by the selection and arrangement of the appropriate facts" (Carr 28, 9). Thus the historian must always make decisions about which pieces of the past should be admitted into the historical record, and these decisions always take place in the historians' present, for "we can view the past, and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present" (28). Concerning antiquity, where all of the facts of history are knowable, the historian's job is simplified. Concerning the near-present, where the facts of history and the facts of the past are intermingled, the historian's job becomes even more dependent upon his/her own methodology and ideology. For Carr, to live in the present and write about history, an historian must cultivate ignorance of the competing pasts. He or she must speak in authoritative tones about subjects wherein certainty actually does not exist.

For all of the historians cited here—from Stone to Carr—the past is knowable only through its remains, through the various texts it has left for the present to interpret. There is, clearly, disagreement about just how complicated—or even possible—this interpretation is. While none of these historians overtly state this, there seem to be three definitions of *history* at work here. First, there is the understanding of *history* as a profession, as a discipline with its own rules, debates, and methodologies (as in the phrase "Dr. Martinez teaches in the History department"). Second, there is the understanding of *history* as a product, a text in its own right, a text open to the same vagaries of meaning and interpretation as any other (as in the phrase "At Dawn We Slept"
is a fine history of the attack on Pearl Harbor"). Ultimately, there seems to be a third assumption about the meaning of *history*: *history* refers to the narrative that ties the disconnected events of the chaotic past to one another and to the events of the present.

As my students and I worked around the edges of this debate, we decided that our understanding of history was based on two related assumptions. First, we conceive of time as a linear progression to make sense of the world around us. Events I witnessed or took part in yesterday preceded the events of today, as today's events predate tomorrow's. Events similar to those of yesterday may occur today, but the events of yesterday are no longer occurring. Because of this linear conception of time, we are driven to narrate our histories. Effects felt today are caused by events from previous days, as events today effect tomorrow. As these conversations developed over the semester, the students and I began to question the nature and purpose of narration. If we are driven to narrate history, and we all agreed that we were, then what are the implications of that drive?

To analyze history as a narrative and narrative as a form of argumentation, we must first consider the nature of narration itself. Walter R. Fisher, amplifying and complicating the definition of *narration* offered earlier by Cicero, argues that “By 'narration,' I refer to a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (“Narration” 375). Fisher argues that this perspective towards narrative is focused on the interpretation and the interpreter rather than on the narrative itself, examining the work the narrative does in its culture rather than the devices that make up its structure. In this context, narratives are
"stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world"
(“Narration” 381).

As he extends the value of narration into this larger cultural context, Fisher argues that two conditions must be met for a narrative to perform its symbolic work successfully. First, a story must possess narrative probability, which is concerned with the coherence and believability of a given narrative. Second, a story must possess narrative fidelity, meaning that a narrative “rings true” with other narratives a listener knows or believes to be true (Human 64-65). Both of these conditions focus on the audience and the questions its members may ask: Does this story seem likely to have happened? Have I heard stories with enough similarity to this one to bolster its credibility? Unlike the historians cited earlier, with their concern for the writer of history, Fisher focuses on the receiver, the audience’s conception of the narrative rather than the narrator and his/her choices.

The danger in Fisher’s focus on the audience as final arbiter of meaning over the speaker/writer is, however, the same as the danger Stone and other historians see postmodernism pushing onto their field. If the audience is the sole decider of meaning, then both author and intent fade into obscurity. As Stone writes in the response to his critics,

No less a figure than Stanley Fish, a prominent leader of the radical movement in literature, has recently brought [historians] reassurance from the camp of literary criticism. He now tells his followers they should cease to bully historians and to “brandish fancy theories that declare all
evidence suspect and ideological." He goes so far as to say: "If you set out to determine what happened [in England] in 1649, you will look at the materials which recommend themselves to you as likely repositories of knowledge, and go from there." (193)

Aside from using Fish to boost his own ethos, Stone makes an important move here: He attempts to take the narrative of history outside of the trap of postmodern relativism. Historical texts—despite their limitations—are the only place knowledge about the past—especially the distant past—can be found. Using Fish, Stone argues that the text is the place to start. From there the historian—or the audience, in Fisher's system—must make judgments about credibility and veracity based on other "materials" wherein the facts of history reside. In the end, the historian must make decisions about what to present, and the audience must make decisions about what to believe.

While scholars argue that the individual interpretation of a text is, in the final analysis, the only interpretation of a text, Fisher, like Stone, sees interpretation as an act involving not only the individual but also the larger culture to which the individual belongs. This is especially true when we turn our analysis to visual history, for the symbols presented on television only make sense when interpreted both against the medium of transmission and the history they purport to transmit (see chapters two and three).

Individualizing interpretation and divorcing it from culture, argues Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, "maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyzes our thinking about time and change [. . .] The only effective liberation from
such constraint," he continues, "begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical" (20). For Jameson and Fisher, narration always takes place in a web of interpretation involving the individual, the social, and the historical. The assumption underlying all of these theories is that humans use narration to make sense of the world around them. This interpretive drive is especially true when narratives of the past are concerned. Having established—and complicated—a tentative definition of narration, I turn now to the argument that history is a narrative that fits the parameters set out by Fisher and Jameson.

Near the end of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that artifacts from an individual's infancy and early childhood such as old report cards and baby pictures exist in "empty time," outside the realm of conscious memory. Because memory cannot frame these relics, an historical narrative must be constructed to frame them, to make sense of them and connect them with the identity of the individual. What cannot be directly remembered, he argues, must be narrated in order to have meaning (204). Thus history, of an individual or of a nation, must be narrative. It cannot be constructed in any other way. For Anderson, this argument about history and narration form only a small part of his text on nationhood; for other critics and historians, though, this idea is a foundation for understanding the past.

"Many historical narratives," Evans argues, "have been devoted to providing historical justification or inspiration for political and social movements in the present" (128). There are, Jean-François Lyotard suggests, essentially two types of historical narrative in this forensic/epideictic conception: master narratives and local narratives.
Lyotard defined master narratives as the state-sanctioned, hegemonic histories that served to silence other voices; local narratives are those that do "not claim omniscience or universal validity and [are] subjective rather than [...] objective historical truth" (qtd. in Evans 128). Local narratives represent the groups traditionally relegated to the margins, the voices speaking from outside of the dominant discourse: women, minorities, students, prisoners, etc. These competing narratives comprise the centripetal and centrifugal forces pulling on various histories. While the master narrative pulls inwards with centripetal force, the local narratives pull outwards with centrifugal force. When these forces compete, there is slippage—disagreement about what happened in the past and what it means.

Defining narrative, Stone argues that "Narrative is taken to mean the organization of material into a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with subplots. [...] Narrative is a mode of historical writing, but it is a mode which also affects and is affected by the content and the method" ("Revival" 3-4). In The Content of the Form, Hayden White makes the related argument that "[N]arrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary as the case may be, already possesses a content prior to any given actualization of it in speech or writing" (xi). Here, White echoes Fisher's ideas about narrative fidelity; for a narrative to "ring true" with the listener, it must bear similarities to previous narratives. To possess narrative fidelity, a story must have either a form or content that is familiar to the audience. To illustrate this form-with-a-preset-content, White turns to the subject of history.
Before considering White’s connections between history and narrative, there must be a consideration of the distinction between historical discourse that narrates and historical discourse that narrativizes. In the latter category, “events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. No one speaks [as a narrator]. The events seem to tell themselves” (Content 3). An example of this type of historical discourse would be the annal, a chronological listing of events. White turns to the *Annals of Saint Gall*, “a list of events that occurred in Gaul during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries of our era,” for his example. This annal contains such entries as “720. Charles fought against the Saxons. / 721. Theudo drove the Saracens out of Aquitaine. / 722. Great crops” (Content 6-7). Connections are implicit between events listed in the annal, but there is no hierarchy according to importance. Indeed, the only remarkable thing about the events, and the only explicit connection between them, is the fact that their occurrences were recorded at all.

Although White’s example does not suggest it, the annal form is still employed often in modern histories. For example, in *The Vietnam War in American Stories, Songs, and Poems*, H. Bruce Franklin offers this partial chronology for the year 1954:

*March 13* Battle of Dien Bien Phu begins.

*April 16* Vice President Richard Nixon publicly proposes sending U.S. troops to Vietnam.

*May 7* Fall of Dien Bien Phu to DRV army.

*May 8-July 21* Geneva Conference. Ends with agreement that all foreign forces will be withdrawn from Vietnam; seventeenth parallel set as
temporary demarcation line between forces of the French Union and those of the DRV; Vietnam to hold internationally supervised elections in 1956 to choose government of the entire country. (331)

This listing of events contains some seeds of narration; specifically, a reader sees that a battle begins on one date and ends on another. An inference could, perhaps, even be made that this battle led to the Geneva Conference, although no evidence explicitly suggests this. As with White’s example, this is a slice of history that narrativizes rather than narrates. Events are listed chronologically and left to attempt to speak for themselves. Without the larger framework of a master-narrative, the events must languish in obscurity (as do Carr’s “facts of the past”). Left to their own devices, these events that narrativize would be impossible to interpret meaningfully. A master narrative must connect them—as in Stanley Karnow’s 752 page *Vietnam: A History*. Without the connections, an audience is left to wonder who or what a Dien Bien Phu is, what DRV means, etc. The events only take on meaning when placed either directly or inferentially into a narrative structure.

In White’s vision of history that narrates, we see a form more familiar to modern readers, a form of history wherein there is “a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole” (9). Rather than a chronologically ordered sequence of seemingly unrelated events, readers are presented with a coherent story that follows a familiar plot—from introduction through denouement.
In addition to separating history that narrates from history that narrativizes, White
draws a distinction between narratives focused on the real and those focused on the
imaginary. The latter is, of course, the realm of the fiction writer—and it is a world
wherein things can narrate themselves. Narratives of the imaginary only need to be true
enough to the form of narration to keep an audience following along; beyond that basic
constraint, there are no rules. Narrative discourse focused on the real is much more
problematic, for it must, by necessity, deal with Carr's facts of history, and the facts of
the past are, by definition, largely unknowable and forgotten (thus their relegation to the
past rather than to history). The facts of the past are left to narratives of the imaginary,
narratives that suggest the way things may have been. Narratives of history purporting to
be real are held to a higher standard—and they are, as the earlier discussion of history
suggests, inherently flawed and blind in some spots both by the historian's methodology
and his/her ideology. As White writes of such troubled narratives of the real, "Every
narrative, however seemingly 'full,' is constructed on the basis of a set of events that
might have been included but were left out" (10). Here White echoes Carr's assertion
about selecting and arranging "the appropriate" facts—the facts subjectively deemed
most important by the writer (9). Both White and Carr suggest—without employing the
term—that these narratives that make up the historical record are arguments. Each sets
forth a thesis about something which happened prior to the present time and then lines up
the most convincing evidence to support that thesis and the conclusions drawn from it.
This imposition of a narrative pattern upon events is further complicated by the cultural
forces at work outside of the narrative. In chapter three I argue that many narratives of
the Vietnam War draw upon familiar images from films such as *Apocalypse Now* to make their points; in chapter four I extend this argument further, particularly through analyzing the construction of the POW, a mythical American figure built upon a foundation of Puritan captivity narratives and films about World War II. To illustrate the point here, I turn briefly to the figures of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg—whose story is again receiving attention in the news media as Attorney General John Ashcroft considers pursuing the death penalty in the prosecution of a newly-discovered Russian spy in the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Considering the Rosenbergs, Virginia Carmichael writes, "The Rosenberg story provides a particularly apt occasion for a consideration of the function of storytelling—of narrative—in history. It was a social drama, providing a starting point for an elaboration of many stories serving various and multiple functions" (xii-xiii). A husband and wife were accused of giving the Soviet Union the secret of the atomic bomb, thus speeding their development of weapons of mass destruction and thereby endangering the United States and its allies. It was an accusation that began with the defection of Igor Gouzenko, a code clerk in the Soviet embassy in Ottawa, Canada, and ended with Julius and Ethel in the electric chair (Fried 62). The story of the Rosenbergs, constructed against the larger narrative of the Cold War, was one of anticommunism, betrayal, the political left versus the right, and the working of foreign and domestic policies on free citizens during a time of tension, but not open warfare, between two superpowers. Constructed within a framework of treason and national interest, the Rosenberg story ended in the only way it could end, with the deaths of the accused spies in the name of the safety of the country.
The story of the Rosenbergs as it was originally constructed and as it is being
reconstructed in the modern media functions as an argument, an argument that may end
with another execution of an American for “selling” secrets.

Arguing the point that narration is a form of argumentation, Fisher writes, “The
logic of good reason maintains that reasoning need not be bound to argumentative prose
or be expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures: Reasoning may be
discovered in all sorts of symbolic actions—nondiscursive as well as discursive”
(“Narration” 375). Thus history can take the form of narration—a chronologically
sequenced series of events purported to be true—and put forth an argument about the
past. To argue successfully, though, the narrative must meet the criteria set forth by
Fisher, White, Carr, and Jameson.

Both Jameson and Fisher argue that narratives must move beyond the personal,
that they must be considered in their social, historical, and moral incarnations. Fisher
puts forth two important aspects of successful narratives: probability and fidelity. A
successful narration must be believable (narrative probability) and must bear similarity to
other narratives (narrative fidelity) for the audience.

Depending on the type of history being constructed, argues White, one of two
paths will be taken: Either the events being described will be narrated or narrativized
(that is, the story will be told or will attempt to tell itself). As White and Carr both argue,
narratives of the past are driven by the present, by the writer or speaker. Because of this,
they leave things out. The narrator, historian, storyteller must make judgments about
what to include and what to exclude from his or her tale of the past. In this process of
inclusion/exclusion, alternating views of the past come into existence. These alternatives make up the competing narratives of the past.

**Back in the Classroom**

In this introduction I have constructed an historical narrative within the genre of “reflective teaching,” for lack of a better term. Within this narrative-driven genre, I mention students and the progression of the semester several times, implying a linear chronological structure. I focus entirely on my own interpretations and reactions. I infer that the information contained here was read by the students and then discussed during class meetings. I even offer the graphic that the students and I developed over the term, in all of its imperfections, as both a starting point for this narration and a defacto form of evidence that any of the events I describe/infer actually took place. As I craft this narrative, and its facts of history, I also relegate much of that semester to the facts of the past. In my narrative and analysis, the students and their work are never described. They are left both faceless and nameless, central players in the development of this work now relegated to the furthest margin of the story—outside of the story, really. I ignore Carlos’ analysis of news stories about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as argumentative narratives, Michelle’s critique of the films *Red Dawn* and *Rocky IV* as cold war propaganda, and Sarah’s study of Nazi imagery’s rhetorical function on the Web sites of several militia groups in Florida.

As this brief list of term-paper topics suggests, the work we did that semester on narrative was not confined to written discourse. In fact, such texts played a small part in
the whole course. Instead, we studied various visual media, especially film and
television. Students watched and analyzed both films and documentaries about the
Vietnam War, particularly Schindler's List and the television documentary from "Day
One" titled They Were Young and Brave, based upon the history of the battle of the Ia
Drang river valley, We Were Soldiers Once and Young. Coupled with our analysis of
history and narrative, this work on visual rhetoric led directly into the argument I
advance in chapter two and support throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

My narrative, focused more on the texts we discussed than on the students, also
eases over the tension and discord of the semester. The idea that history could be a half-
truth or lie was uncomfortable for some students. This discomfort led, I think, to a
comment I often consider while giving my students their end-of-term evaluation forms.
One student anonymously passed the following judgment on me and on the class's work
that semester: "We read a lot, but Mr. Borrowman's frequent mistakes while discussing
Vietnam made him appear foolish." I have mulled this comment over for years, long
after the praise and well-thought out criticism of other students has faded. I think I
finally understand it—or at least have an idea of where it came from. The class spent the
entire semester discussing the rhetoric of historical narratives. We tentatively agreed that
there was little difference in such a setting between events that happened, events that
might have happened as they are described, and events that did not happen. All of them
have their place in various narratives, and the line between fiction and fact is not always a
clear one. The mistakes this student saw were, perhaps, simply places where our
narratives of the past diverged.
MAKING HISTORY:
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND VISUAL HISTORY

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have, over the past twenty years, developed a keen sense of the history of this field and of its own historiography. It is, however, a sense that has developed in near-isolation, with no connection to visual media; we have relied upon our powers of analysis to show us the way and have thus focused entirely on the rhetoric of written history—archival materials, transcribed speeches, newspaper accounts, etc. We have focused our histories—and our study of history—on the written and spoken word, the traditional realms of rhetoric. This exclusion of visual representations of the past is understandable, considering the prejudice against the study of film and television that traditionally exists in the field of English where, as Richard M. Gollin argues, if “we bring film study into traditional courses in literature our colleagues regard us with genial condescension, as if we were harmlessly drunk” (424). (This prejudice is analyzed in much greater detail in chapter five.) Echoing the bias in the historiography of rhetoric and composition towards the written word, Victor J. Vitanza writes, in an entry in The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition, “Historiography, in general, is the study of the different biases of, or attitudes toward, writing history” (324, italics added). Ronald Carpenter offers a similarly narrow view in History as Rhetoric when he argues, “Because of their reliance upon words, writers of history [. . .] cannot escape potential rhetorical elements and effects that accrue simply from two discrete and significant facets of their process of composition: style and narrative” (2). Clearly the focus for both Vitanza and Carpenter is on writing history, on the text-based artifact an
Historian produces within the confines of his or her academic community and the genre it has developed, and Carpenter even goes so far as to separate the concerns of style and narrative in the writing of history (an explicit nod towards the genre of historical writing as it exists within academe). Because of this focus on writing, a major portion of the historical record is ignored and under-theorized in the historiography of rhetoric and composition: the visual texts, particularly those on television.

Even when the focus of a discussion of rhetoric includes visual imagery, the emphasis is still on the written text. Stephen A. Bernhardt, defining the term visual rhetoric, begins with the promising statement that “Narrowly, [visual rhetoric is] the study of the design of text on pages; more generally, the study of all visual signs, including the semiotics of the graphic arts, television, and other media” (746). Yet the remainder of his definition focuses on the weaving of graphics and pictures together either on a printed page or computer screen. Television is not mentioned again, and none of the sources in his bibliography explicitly cover television. Even visual rhetoric, it seems, is concerned more with the traditional realms of rhetoric—speech and writing—than with a medium like television.

I do not mean to imply that the study of visual rhetoric has been entirely ignored; instead, I argue that it exists in two specific areas: film study and work in computer-mediated composition. Both are examined at length in chapter five of this dissertation, and both areas of study have always existed on the margins of the discipline of rhetoric and composition. As Vincent B. Leitch argues, “Despite rumors to the contrary, the attitude ‘anything goes’ does not exist. Certain topics, methods, and subjects simply
appear beyond the pale. The disciplines are at once enabling and productive and restrictive and confining” (125). In departments of English, computers existed outside the disciplinary realm until recently; now that they have become a large part of the business of composition, they have become a legitimized field of study. Film study, as I argue in chapter five, has always existed on the edges of English, under-represented in professional journals and haphazardly theorized. Critical study of television within English is nearly nonexistent.

Rather than focusing on the writing of history, my argument focuses on the making of history on television. More specifically, I argue that the documentaries, advertisements, and stories constructed for television all follow traditional patterns of master and local narration, as defined by scholars in rhetoric and composition, that create a past both to frame the stories and to encourage certain interpretations of the information being presented while discouraging others. The use of such narratives on television, as Daniel Miller argues, “obscures reality and facilitates revision, mythology, and the portrayal of contemporary events as natural, unmotivated, and beyond the control and understanding of the public” (175). The narratives privileged on television guide audiences into specific interpretations of the present through carefully constructed images of the past, images that limit critical understanding of events.

My purpose here is to analyze the history of rhetoric and composition and to advance the historiographical methods developed in this field beyond the written word to the visual medium of television, to the visual history constructed there. As John E. O’Connor argues in the pages of The American Historical Review,
It has now been 150 years since the invention of photography, a hundred years since the invention of motion pictures, and fifty years since the invention of television. In politics, diplomacy, and an ever expanding number of research areas, questions arise in which ignoring the visual evidence is an injustice to the subject. (1200)

In chapter one I summarized the position that history is most often understood as a narrative about the past, a sequence of selected events organized chronologically in a cause and effect pattern. I also argued that narratives, including historical narratives, are a form of argument. Because history—including the visual history alluded to by O'Conner—is an argument about the past used to explain the present and to support future courses of action or inaction, it is a form of both forensic and deliberative rhetoric. Thus it must be studied by scholars in rhetoric and composition as a form of argumentation.

There are several parts to my argument in this chapter. In the first, I turn to the historians and historiographers of rhetoric and composition, using Susan Jarratt’s *Rereading the Sophists* as an example of the manner in which history is often written—and critiqued—in this discipline. In the end, I explore the work of scholars in media studies and communications, defining visual history. Through this argument, I demonstrate how the historiographical methods of rhetoric and composition must move beyond archives and written histories to develop an understanding of visual history, an understanding informed by work in other fields but crafted within the framework of this interdisciplinary discipline.
The History of Composition, the Composition of History

In this section, I begin with an analysis of the debate within rhetoric and composition over the history of our discipline, particularly its interpretation of the sophists. From this analysis, I branch outwards—using the work of scholars such as Thomas Miller, Robert Connors, and James Berlin—into an analysis of the problems of writing, reading, and valuing our history.

Discussing the history of rhetoric, Robert Connors writes that “Rhetorical history as a scholarly field has existed for nearly as long as rhetoric itself; rhetoricians have always seemed to feel it important to honor or argue with their forebears” (Writing 50). Connors argues that the history of composition as it is currently envisioned began with Albert R. Kitzhaber’s 1953 dissertation Rhetoric in American Colleges. Amplifying on the effects of this single dissertation on both the history of composition and on historians of composition, Connors writes that

*Rhetoric in American Colleges* can be corrosive; it is often bitterly critical. With Kitzhaber comes the tendency, seen in much of the later historical work that used his dissertation as a basis, to create heroes and villains out of figures in the history of composition. Kitzhaber’s heroes—Fred Newton Scott, Gertrude Buck, John Genung—became the heroes of such second-generation historians as Donald Stewart and James Berlin; his villains—primarily Adams S. Hill and the “Harvard crowd”—became our villains. And for all later historians of composition, Kitzhaber became
“the lion in the road”: we could not go around him without dealing with his work. *Writing* 54).

It is not enough, however, to analyze histories of composition in terms of heroes and villains, for these histories are more than the sum of the parts of their narratives—although analysis of the narratives themselves can provide a useful point of departure. Beyond the narrative, the historian, the historian’s data, and the claims the historian bases on the data must all be examined.

To examine the history of rhetoric and composition, I begin my analysis not with a dissertation from 1953 but with the story of the sophists. They are the “heroes”—or “villains”—in many histories of rhetoric in the West. The purpose of this analysis is illustrative: In the manipulation of the history of the sophists, the debates within the historiography of rhetoric and composition are played out on a small scale. Specifically, I begin this analysis of the histories of composition with Susan Jarratt’s *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, wherein the sophists are historicized and revitalized in a way that is applicable to composition in general and to critical pedagogy in particular, defined by Ann George as a pedagogy that empowers students, engages them actively in critiquing the culture around them, and encourages them to fight for social change (92).

Arguing her history of the sophists—and the interpretations she bases on that history—Jarratt moves her argument through two basic phases: In the first, she explores and interrogates the history of the sophists. In the second, she explicates the connections between the methods and philosophies of the sophists and modern specialists in
composition and rhetoric. As she examines the histories of the sophists in the first piece of her argument, Jarratt argues that "The radically different uses of the sophists in previous eras suggest that we can discover something about our own intellectual and political climate by assessing the ways the sophists are presented. There are, she argues, three basic approaches to the sophists in modern composition and rhetoric (5-6). The first approach, championed by writers such as Richard Leo Enos and James Poulakos, aims at "establishing the sophists as serious thinkers" (6). The second approach, spawned by Derridean deconstruction, wherein Plato, the sophists, and Socrates are played off against one another, especially concerning the strength of writing (7-8). The third, and final, approach begins with Robert Scott and Barry Brummet’s work on epistemic rhetoric. This approach extends through the debates over language and reality between Richard Rorty, James Berlin, and others, ultimately culminating in what is currently known as "social-construction" theory, where "the source of knowledge about reality [rests] in the conversation of a social group" (9). Jarratt connects this third approach directly to composition pedagogy via the work of writers like Kenneth Bruffee and Patricia Bizzell.

Having established these three approaches to the sophists, Jarratt examines the implications of study of the sophists to the historiography of the field of composition-rhetoric. She argues, "Traditional histories of rhetoric could be defined as those histories having taken as their subject matter chiefly documents explicitly calling themselves ‘rhetories’: i.e., pedagogical treatises concerned with the composition and delivery of persuasive orations" (12-13). The sophists, she argues, never saw their work in such a
narrow, limited sense. They were concerned with cultural norms and the effective deployment of language within various settings, including literary, scientific, and poetic discourse. To write and study history in this "sophistic" way, then, means to "work with an expanded range of materials: not only the pedagogical treatises summarized in traditional histories, but any literary artifact as it operates to shape knowledge and effect social action" (13). Such an approach to history is more inclusive than exclusive, as it examines both the texts at the center and the texts at the margins of a given field. For Jarratt, this approach to history is especially applicable to the work of feminists in the field of composition-rhetoric. Elaborating on the connection she sees between the early sophists and the exclusion of women from the rhetorical tradition, Jarratt writes,

[T]he canon in [the] history of rhetoric, as in the rest of the European intellectual tradition, excludes women. Another early exclusion within the history of rhetoric became ultimately the exclusion of rhetoric: i.e., the condemnation of the rhetoric of the first sophists by Plato and Aristotle, who redefine rhetoric in their own terms [. . .]. Thus a group of teachers and performers who were the first to formalize rhetoric as an art are largely ignored in traditional histories of rhetoric. (63)

Jarratt argues that these two exclusions—of the early sophists and of women—are in fact related.

For Plato and his intellectual descendants, "the sophists signified opinion as opposed to Truth, the materiality of the body (e.g., in association with cooking and cosmetics) vs. soul, practical knowledge vs. science, the temporal vs. the eternal, writing
[... vs. speech" (Jarratt 65). Essentially, the sophists were associated with things stereotypical to women. This denigration of both women and sophists extends in the construction of "style" as a mere addendum to the real work of rhetoric—further associating the two with "sensuality, costume, and color—all of which are supposed to be manipulated in attempts to persuade through deception" (Jarratt 65).

In the last section of her argument, Jarratt brings these three threads—sophistry, feminism, and composition pedagogy—together. She writes, "Elements of the theory of language and society on which these sophistic practices are based undergird a number of contemporary composition theories," including epistemic rhetoric, social construction, and social cognition. Specifically, Jarratt connects sophistic pedagogy to the radical, emancipatory pedagogy as practiced by such teachers as Paulo Freire and Ira Shor. In their work, these "critical pedagogues revive the goals of the first sophists" (Jarratt 107). This line of argument is extended further by examination of the work of feminists like bell hooks. Ultimately, Jarratt argues that "the sophists made a valuable contribution to their own world and provide for us a desirable model for emulation in deciding questions about the relation of theory to practice and the relation of school to politics" (116).

Jarratt is open about her project to offer this "reinterpretation of the history of classical rhetoric in order to forward the cause of a politically progressive composition pedagogy" (117). While her text certainly advances this project, such a disclaimer does not make the argument immune from criticism, especially in historiographical terms. One writer who criticizes projects such as Jarratt's soundly is Edward Schiappa.
In 1991, the same year Jarratt’s reinterpretation of the sophists appeared, Schiappa published “Sophistic Rhetoric: Oasis or Mirage?” in the pages of Rhetoric Review. He begins by arguing that “sophistic rhetoric’ is, for the most part, a mirage—something we see because we want to see it—which vaporizes once carefully scrutinized” (5). The sophists, he argued, are impossible to group together, as the label is applied inconsistently; because it is impossible to label the sophists, it is an exercise in fiction to describe sophistic rhetoric in anything but uncertain tones. Ultimately, he decides that the sophists are neither an oasis nor a mirage. They are, instead, a reservoir, “a human-made construct with many possible uses” (16). But there is one use to which Schiappa does not think the sophists may be legitimately put, and it is the usage made by Jarratt.

Schiappa argues against contemporary appropriation of sophistic texts, fearing that such historical reconstruction directs and develops “the concerns of ancient authors in ways probably not anticipated by those authors. Instead, contemporary needs and interests guide the process of selectively appropriating aspects of past authors’ texts” (“Sophistic Rhetoric” 686). Further, Schiappa argues, “[W]e do not need the fiction of ‘sophistic rhetoric’ as a way into pressing contemporary issues. In a culture saturated by rhetoric, we need not seek refuge in a romanticized fictionalization of a place ‘long ago and far away’” (“Oasis” 14). In short, this is what Jarratt does: She rereads the sophists, refigures their place in the rhetorical tradition, and then bases her arguments about the value of radical pedagogy and feminism upon these foundations of revisionism. All of this is, as Roger Gilles writes, “part of her conviction that history is to be ‘used’ for
present purposes” (377). This is a conviction with which Schiappa takes exception, arguing that “we should skip the detour and move directly to the contemporary sites of social and political struggle” (“Oasis” 14).

This criticism of Jarratt is unnecessarily harsh, for she is reasonably open about—and clearly aware of—many of the appropriations and interpretations she is making. The juxtapositioning of Jarratt and Schiappa serves, instead, to highlight the debate over the writing, reading, and valuing of histories. Rather than writing a new history and then using that history to justify contemporary arguments, we should, as Tom Miller argues, study the rhetoric of the rhetorical tradition, and of traditions in general (26). We must study not only our histories but our historiographies as well. Jarratt’s work to revitalize and de-vilify the sophists serves as an example of the debates over the histories of rhetoric and the uses to which those histories may legitimately be put. To elaborate on this point, I turn now to the arguments advanced in the “Octalog” in 1988 and again in 1997.

Commenting on the definitions and descriptions of historiography offered in the “Octalog,” Kevin Brooks writes that it “contains many descriptions of what historians do, but none of the descriptions move very far beyond the dialectical notion that writing history is the product of the historian interacting with historical materials,” a conception of history Stone advances in the pages of Past and Present (7). To illustrate this “dialectical notion,” I begin with Nan Johnson.

As she articulates her ideas about the history of this discipline, Nan Johnson takes a middle position on a key issue in the historiography of composition-rhetoric:
My ideological stance toward historiography falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum of beliefs ranging from an orthodox confidence in the expository nature of history (the notion that writing history is a straightforward matter of uncovering and explaining essentials and orders that are there to be discovered) to a post-structuralist self-consciousness of history as a form of literary narrative (the notion that the substance of history is figurative not actual). I proceed on the assumption that historical research and writing are archaeological and rhetorical activities. As an historian, I am responsible both to the claims of historical evidence and to the burden of proclaiming my enterprise as an attempt to tell “true stories.” (“Octalog” 9-10)

For Johnson, the writing of history is, in the end, about telling the truth about the past through stories. This conception of historical work places the burden upon the historian him/herself; it is the historian’s job to both uncover and articulate truth. A key player in the rhetorical situation is not accounted for in Johnson’s description of the work of historians: the audience. Other participants in the “Octalog” do not make this same omission.

Brooks criticizes Connors heavily for being focused more on the historian than on the audiences who read and interpret history. To level this criticism, he draws from “Dream and Play: Historical Method and Methodology,” where Connors does focus heavily on the role of the historian in the archives in the production of history. In the
"Octalog," however, Connors himself paints a very different picture of the work he does.

In his opening statement he argues that

I write history to try to make my world a better place, to try to brighten the corner in which I live and work. And in order to do this at all, I have to accept certain things in my epistemological world, as assented to by you, by people who read what I write, by the community of discourse in which I live. I have to accept the idea that truth for us is consensually created by our assent to it. I have to accept the idea that there is an "I" who can assent and persuade, and a "you" who can assent and be persuaded. I have to accept the idea that there is evidence that we can agree exists, and good reasons for accepting or not accepting it. (12)

Even a casual glance over this opening shows that Connors is concerned with more than the historians themselves—as he uses the word you again and again to refer to the community of readers that both establishes the standards for historical research and evaluates the products of such research. Even Sharon Crowley, who has "almost come to the conclusion that it's impossible to write history," sees audience as a key component in the writing of history. She states, near the end of her opening statement, "[S]ince I am a historian of composition studies, I have to remember that my ideas are going to be read by people who have very pragmatic aims. 'Of what use is this to me in my teaching?' they will ask" (14). Here the audience not only makes meaning from the history it reads, but it also judges the value of that history to the work in which the members of the audience are engaged.
In his review of the “Octalog,” Brooks argues that “Only Richard Leo Enos even suggests that readers might be involved in the process of making meaning [. . . But] Enos [. . .] privileges the role of authorial intention as the key to enabling meaning-making” (7). While there is some truth to this claim—Enos is the only participant in the “Octalog” to so explicitly discuss audience—it also takes the criticism too far, as evidenced by the discussion above. While Enos does give weight to authorial intent, he makes it clear from the beginning that he understands the cultural and disciplinary forces at work on both the historian and the history he/she produces: Historians of rhetoric, he argues, “exist in a tacit academy. The community of researchers participate in a dialectic in which research is articulated and responded to primarily through journal essays, books, and reviews” (14-15). Despite Brooks criticism, Enos sees the making of meaning as a dialectical process between the historian (and his/her research) and the audience to whom the work of the historian is articulated.

In his opening statement, James Berlin also mentions audience as a component in the writing of history, although he does so only in passing. “History,” he argues, “does not write itself, having in itself no inherent pattern of development. Historians cannot escape this play of power, inherent in all signifying practices. They must instead attempt to locate themselves in this play, to find their predilections and to forward them, making them available to their auditors” (11). Clearly Berlin’s historians are not working in a vacuum void of audiences. They are advancing arguments based on their research and their own biases; an argument, as rhetoricians have always made clear, must be advanced to someone. Without an audience, there can be no argument. But Berlin moves one step
beyond this implicit mention of audience; his historians make their work, their arguments, "available to their auditors." Again, audience is key to the work of the historians—as nearly all of the participants in the "Octalog" argue in one way or another.

Brooks argues that the historians in the "Octalog," with the exception of Richard Enos, are ignorant of the role of audience in the interpretation of histories. This argument is based on a severely reductive understanding of the work of the historians he examines, but the conclusion Brooks reaches is still both valid and important: "Thinking of the writing of history as communicative interaction—as triangulation—with others and one's artifacts and not as dialectical exchange may alter, however slightly, the way we value and respond to the voice of others in the making of our histories" (19). This is a thread that is examined in more detail in "Octalog II" by a new group of historians.

As he states his position in the "Octalog," Berlin also advances an argument that other participants either skirt around or ignore entirely: the limitations of history. He states, "All histories are partial accounts, are both biased and incomplete. The good histories admit this and then tell their stories. The bad attempt to dominate the past, pretending at the same time to be mere recorders of the facts" (12). This is a theme further examined in "Octalog II: The (Continuing) Politics of Historiography."

Arguing the value of deep archival research, Linda Ferreira-Buckley writes that in her history she has "sacrificed the pleasures of style for historical depth. [. . . Because] very often we impose narrative structures where they ought not be by smoothing over missing links" (26). By narrating a seamless history, rather than a fragmented one, Ferreira-Buckley argues that we leave our work underresearched and overtheorized,
sacrificing the messiness of depth for the superficially pleasing power of narration.

Cheryl Glenn writes that “Rhetorical history has never been neutral territory; it has always done exactly what we wanted it to do” (28). Elaborating on this idea of using history for our own purposes, Janice Lauer summarizes several competing histories of rhetoric and composition:

A few histories of our field have also woven master narratives. One type of epic argues that the initiating forces in rhetoric and composition were major eastern universities in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though these accounts have been challenged by several people that helped develop the field in the sixties, the narrative continues to be told. Another type of narrative “definitively” confines formative factors like journal founding and editing, graduate program development, bibliographic efforts, conference and seminar construction, and informal networking and mentoring. Other stories narrow their version of the “true beginning” to cognitive or social-construction theory, relegating other work to “pre-disciplinary” tales. (31)

Like Berlin and others, Lauer concludes that our histories are imbued with our own ideology. This is, she argues, not a problem—as long as authors share their purposes for writing with their audience, foregrounding the argument in their history.

Like Lauer, Thomas Miller offers competing stories of the study of the history of rhetoric and composition (although his narratives focus on presentations at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, where both Octalogs originally
took place). One of Miller's narratives is "a story of decline" which uses statistical evidence to point to the lack of interest in historical studies at CCCC. The competing narrative "would argue that the program [at CCCC] actually includes more historical work than ever before. Our sense of history has simply expanded" (40, 42). Both narratives are plausible interpretations based upon the existing data. Both arguments, both histories, could be successfully written. Depending on the ideology of the listener, either could be considered "right." But Miller, unlike the other participants in "Octalog" and "Octalog II," moves beyond this triangular arrangement between author, audience, and narrative. He argues that historians who work in this field "differ from historians in most fields because we assume that the purpose of historical inquiry is not just understanding but action" (43). History is an argument, but it is an argument with a goal beyond simply "winning," simply being taken seriously as a master narrative of the field of rhetoric and composition. Arguments over the history of rhetoric and composition are, instead, arguments meant to move the audience to action, to a specific way of behaving in the present based upon their understanding of the past.

Like Miller, Schiappa is unwilling "to see history-writing as 'merely' the idiosyncratic projections of the historian's own ego" upon the past (37). Instead, he argues that "the writing of history is a thoroughly rhetorical enterprise [that] can be evaluated with the traditional tools of rhetorical criticism, including the analysis and evaluation of the first, second, and third personae enacted through the text of the historian" (36-37). In his schema, the first personae is that of the Historian as Arguer. The second personae is the implied audience of the text. The third personae is the Other,
the marginalized voices silenced by the historian’s text. Schiappa argues that an understanding of historical writing informed by these three personae “can encourage historians to recognize the ideological and epistemological assumptions of their writing” (38).

Schiappa’s analytical model allows for more analysis than he perhaps realizes. Thinking of the historian as first and foremost an arguer foregrounds the rhetorical nature of historical writing. An arguer cannot wrap him or herself in a cloak of supposed objectivity no matter what the nature of their research. By highlighting the audience, the second personae, historians cannot efface this all-important piece of the rhetorical situation, as is done in “Octalog.” If the historian is an arguer—first personae—then he/she must have an audience to whom to argue—second personae. Because audience is a primary component of this historiographical method, the purpose of the argument is also pulled from the background. If a specific argument is being presented to a specific audience, then some form of action or understanding is being called for.

The third personae, the voice of the marginalized, is the one with which “Octalog II” is most concerned; it is also, ultimately, the voice Jarratt listens for in her revision of the ancient sophists. Traditional histories of rhetoric and composition have highlighted major works or major figures—to the exclusion of women and people of color. Discussions of the third personae, such as those advanced by Kathleen Welch, make such exclusions much more difficult (and much more obvious when they do occur). While Schiappa, Miller, and the other participants in the Octalogs clearly focus their attention on the written word, their work is applicable to other non-typographical texts. To extend
their arguments to the visual world of the television media, however, the work of scholars outside of rhetoric and composition must be considered.

The Rhetoric of Visual History: Photography, Film, and Television

To organize this section I have divided the work into two basic parts: In section one I analyze the still-image, the photograph, and its place in the recording of history. In section two I extend this analysis to the moving images presented on film and television. My definition of visual history grows out of both analyses. In chapters three and four I analyze three examples of the construction of visual history on television: a commercial and two news broadcasts. To begin this section, I turn to two examples, one well known and one relatively unknown: (1) the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and subsequent appearance of the Zapruder film, the still photographs taken from that film, and the documentaries and movies made decades later and (2) the digital doctoring of a photograph in the Minneapolis Star Tribune and the controversy such an unethical practice spawned in journalistic circles, where the generic conventions of objectivity and factual reporting run headlong into manipulations made possible by advances in computer-enhanced photography.

To illustrate the move from picture to moving image—and the effects each has on the making of history—consider the imaging of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As Marita Sturken writes of the most famous images of this event, "[The Zapruder film] is both a still and moving image icon: because the moving image was restricted from public view, for twelve years it was seen in public only as a series of
stills” (26). The “stills” first appeared in Life magazine, and assassination historians argue that the order of some of the frames was reversed and the captions were misleading, contributing to a muddled understanding of the sequence of events. When the film finally aired in 1975, it was immediately imbued “with fantasy and nostalgia” as it was placed into a national narrative of America’s fall from innocence as well as a narrative of romance and adventure, symbolized first by the idea of the New Frontier and later by Camelot—all examples of genres where the search for truth is foregrounded less than it is in journalism. The power of Zapruder’s film to narrate the assassination was so strong that it became the narrative of events. The film has, in fact, “become so synonymous with the assassination that some think it was seen live on television” (Sturken 29). But the images of the assassination of JFK have grown beyond the Zapruder film. In 1976 a reenactment of the film was staged for a videotape titled The Eternal Frame. The tape reached only a small audience, but it led to increased interest in the assassination. In 1991 Oliver Stone released JFK, which mixes fact and fiction to establish the existence of a conspiracy to kill JFK—a conspiracy involving Cuba, the CIA, the Mafia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Lyndon Baines Johnson. As Sturken argues, “Much of the controversy surrounding JFK concerned Oliver Stone’s audacity at playing the historian” (32). Such controversy comes from the grinding of one genre against another—the genre of the feature film, with its focus on drama and resolution, and the genre of the historians, with its focus (like journalism) on objectivity and truth.

The progression of events Sturken summarizes encapsulates the problem I address in this and subsequent chapters. The Kennedy assassination occurred on November 11,
1963. Still images published in *Life*, possibly presented out of order, led to a flawed understanding of the events of that day. The Zapruder film, shown on television in 1975, seemed to fix these flaws by presenting the “truth” about what happened that day in Dallas—a “truth” heavily mediated by the television news media personalities, such as Geraldo Rivera, involved in the presentation of the film to the public. Ultimately, Zapruder’s film was subsumed by a larger narrative: Stone’s movie *JFK*, which both presented and interpreted the events Zapruder’s camera recorded. Rather than attempting to let the Zapruder film stand by itself, open to audience interpretation, Stone surrounds it with a narrative involving the mafia, the CIA, and a patsy named Lee Harvey Oswald. This allows the Zapruder film—forces it, in fact—to be read in a narrow, conspiracy-driven way. For those of us born after 1963, the still images, the Zapruder film, and *JFK* mediate our understanding of this traumatic event. As technology has improved, the power of images to narrate history has become even more problematic. While historians argued that *Life* misarranged the still photographs from the Zapruder film, there was no argument that the stills were inaccurate or that they had been tampered with in any way. The photographs were accepted as facts. As computers and digital photography have improved, such acceptance can no longer be blithely extended.

In December of 1996, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* ran a front page story about the US Department of the Interior’s rejection of a plan to build a new bridge across the St. Croix River. Accompanying the story was a photograph of the current bridge spanning the river, taken by Stormi Greener, a respected photographer. For her fine photograph, Greener was awarded a two-day suspension with loss of pay. This was her
punishment for digitally reworking the photograph to remove unsightly powerlines that partially obstructed the subject—a manipulation strictly taboo within the profession of journalistic photography. Rather than simply cleaning dust spots from the negative, an accepted practice, Greener had altered the reality presented in the photograph so that it was no longer a “factual” representation of the real bridge. As Dona Schwartz comments on this incident, the implication is “that photographs, left unmolested by overzealous photo technicians, offer an unmediated view of the world” (158-59).

This incident in Minnesota points to two contradictory claims within the genre of photojournalism. On one hand, pictures are considered to be factual, truthful representations of the world. On the other, photographers are celebrated for their genius and creativity. But the latter position is eclipsed by the former: The photographs that appear in the news media are linked much more strongly to notions of truth than to notions of art (Schwartz 160). To claim the photograph as a factual and objective representation of the world, digital reimagining is not the only move for which we must account. The photographer makes choices about lenses, lighting, and focus. He or she decides what to include and not to include in the shot—and when the shot itself will be made. Such choices must be effaced, for they cannot be conceived of as “objective.” Thus they are relegated to the realm of art, a genre with much looser conventions, rather than discussed in relation to factual representation. As she traces the rise of the visual image in news reporting, and particularly the split between photography as artistic representation and photography as factual recording, Schwartz concludes that
the invention of photography occurred at an opportune moment. Photography emerged as the visual medium best suited to take up the mantle of objectivity, based on the popularly held view that a mechanical device, a camera, makes photographs. The deficiencies attributed to images produced by sketch artists' hands were eradicated by the modern, technological picture-making medium. (173)

Although this view of photographs as facts has come to dominate public thinking on the issue, Schwartz discusses several infractions perpetrated by photographers that led to less-than-credible images.

First, Schwartz describes a violation of photojournalism norms known as the "set-up," a practice in which photographers make a shot more interesting by "using props, posing subjects, directing reenactments, constructing fabrications, and using models" (175). During the Kosovo conflict, for example, numerous images of NATO violence against fleeing refugees were discredited when it was shown that some of the same props—most notably a child's stuffed bear—were present in nearly every picture, even though the pictures were said to come from different locations. A second complication described by Schwartz concerns the presence of the photographer him/herself. She writes, "[Photographers] may intentionally or unintentionally act as catalysts, provoking behavior among subjects that would not otherwise have occurred. The most extreme example of such reactivity is the photo-opportunity, an event staged solely for the purpose of provoking news coverage" (176). Examples of this occurrence abound—in minor and major forms. During the protests against the World Trade Organization in
Seattle in 1999, many protesters clearly pandered to the camera—acting out violently when the lens was focused on them, behaving more civilly when the cameras were not around. During the Republican National Convention and Democratic National Convention in 2000, both staged photo-opportunities on a grand scale, other groups tried valiantly to draw media attention, protesting and even rioting—before the camera and, many pundits argued, because of the camera. Though both of my examples come from recent years, I do not mean to imply that this is a "new" occurrence. As William D. Harpine argues, William McKinley’s 1896 campaign for the presidency “consisted of a series of artificial events staged for the media” wherein McKinley could craft an image of himself as someone who cared about the needs of the common man, a candidate with whom diverse audiences could identify (73).

Concerning the printing of pictures, matters are no more clear. Certain procedures—cropping, for example—are accepted as legitimate within photojournalism, unless such an activity dramatically alters the perceived meaning of a picture. Other methods are more widely frowned upon: modifying or eliminating backgrounds, airbrushing, and cutting and pasting are all met with disapproval by photojournalists (Schwartz 176). The rise of digital imaging technology has only further complicated this issue, for manipulation of photographs done with computers is much more difficult to detect than were older methods.

Schwartz concludes that “The strategic elevation of recording above expression, of fact above art, that emerged along with the commercial press has encouraged denial of the constructed, authored nature of photographic representations” (180). Because she is
focused solely on the inherent contradiction of recording vs. expression, Schwartz draws no conclusions about the effects of various photojournalistic practices beyond either the reinforcement or loss of credibility in the public realm. What effects do pictures taken by photojournalists and widely disseminated have on the ways in which the public understands war, for example? To explore the consequences of the genre conventions under which photojournalism exists, I first turn to an example from the past, specifically Canada’s remembrance of forced military conscription during the Great War.

In “Fact, Fiction, or Fantasy: Canada and the War to End All Wars,” David R. Spencer extends Schwartz’s analysis of the constructed nature of photojournalism to the writing of national history, confining his analysis of Canadian World War I imagery to still photographs because they are so much more plentiful than full motion video, although such video is available. Explaining the rationale for his analysis, he writes, “As much as photography may play a valid role in the telling of a collective past, it must, like all other forms of historical evidence, be treated with its own set of reflections” (184). To explain these reflections, Spencer analyzes Canadian newspapers’ representations of the Great War, where the vast majority of photographs that appeared, especially during the debates over conscription, were “value-laden, constantly depicting the German empire and its leader Kaiser Wilhelm as the singular expression of evil in a world consumed in turmoil” (193). As the war went on, and fewer and fewer volunteers returned home—or returned home unscathed—two basic views of the war developed. The first group viewed Canada’s participation in the war as an act of loyalty; Canada owed its existence to Britain and would pay its debt with its youth. The opposing view was less sympathetic to
Britain's needs. For members of this group, support for Britain was equated with a justification for Britain's imperialistic designs on Canada and the rest of the world. While the hawkish group's view is most represented in published photographs, opponents of the war also managed to make the darker side of the conflict clear—through pictures of Canadian prisoners of war, battle-scarred veterans, and wheel-chair bound officers. As the hawks gained power in Canadian government, negative pictures of the war became even more scarce. French-language papers continued to portray a darker, less heroic vision of the European battlefield, but conscription continued.

Concluding his analysis, Spencer states, "As visual images take a more important place in the relating of historical events, it is critical that their impact be placed squarely within the context of events as they occurred" (203). In his methodology, this means two moves must be made. First, the historian must look to the visual records with the same discerning eye he/she brings to written records of the past—acknowledging the rhetorical nature of photography as Schwartz argues. But the historian must also step outside of the master narrative by examining the local narratives—the narratives of those who, in this case, worked the farms and factories, and died by the thousands on the slopes of Vimy Ridge.

While Spencer's analysis of Canadian photographs and their effects on the conscription debate is detailed and well argued, it does not take his point as far as the title suggests it will. The schism between English and French speaking Canadians is touched upon; the tensions between various ethnic and socio-economic groups are also referenced. But the argument about Canada's history of the Great War being factual,
fictional, or fantastic is never explicated in any detail, even though some historians, such as James L. Stokesbury, have argued that Canadian nationalism is inextricably bound to its suffering in World War I. Stokesbury argues, in fact, “It is not too imaginative to say that Canada became a nation on the slopes of Vimy Ridge” where, in a single battle, more than 10,000 Canadians were killed.

Michael Griffin’s analysis of “great war” photographs (not Great War photographs, as his title suggests), builds upon the work of both Schwartz and Spencer. The majority of his article is taken up by a summary and analysis of the history of photojournalism itself, especially in relation to picturing warfare. Griffin does make important points about photographs and history. Through analysis of images from the American and Spanish civil wars, World War II, Vietnam, and the Gulf War (although the latter is touched upon only very briefly), Griffin argues that

Combat photojournalism has come to represent the height of photographic realism. Photo correspondents are described as wielding cameras like weapons, rushing with bravado into the midst of action to “shoot” the valiant and grim events of human conflict. […] The enduring images of war are not those that exhibit the most raw and genuine depictions of life and death on the battlefield, nor those that illustrate historically specific information about people, places, and things, but rather those that most readily present themselves as symbols of cultural and national myth.
The pictures most celebrated in a culture are those that best represent its values or fears. Thus World War II is imaged as a heroic struggle of good versus evil—good represented by images like that of the Marines lifting the flag over Iwo Jima, evil represented by photos of emaciated prisoners and piles of twisted bodies. The Vietnam War, on the other hand, is best remembered in the images of terrified prisoners held at gunpoint at My Lai and terrified children running from a napalm inferno. These are the images that represent American culture's aspirations and fears—embodied in its best known photographs.

In terms of history, which Griffin defines as "cultural memory," photographs are generally isolated from their contexts and therefore "become enveloped in aesthetic genres, historical narratives, and cultural mythology" in order for individuals to make meaning of them (147). Produced within the confines of one genre, photographs are then enmeshed within others, within genres of interpretation that do not share the same assumptions when making meaning and constructing narration. Griffin argues that photographs only have meaning when placed into a commonly held story, a master narrative of the past. When photographs leave this master narrative, or the master narrative leave them, they lose credibility: "Photographs, as facts, begin to be questioned when the narratives to which they are linked lose authority" (148). Griffin draws his examples of this loss of credibility from earlier centuries; his concluding example of the essay is far more illustrative (even though he includes it for different reasons). During the Gulf War in 1991, images of smart-bombs devastating Iraqi structures dominated, coupled with pictures of brave, determined soldiers and the families they left behind; jovial, knowledgeable military leaders; and desperate Iraqis willingly surrendering to
anyone from the UN coalition. Yet, as Griffin argues, "the human consequences of warfare remained almost completely invisible. [. . .] Virtually no photographs of American [or Iraqi] casualties were shown or published until several months after the war" (151). Such pictures are still rare, as are pictures of dissent on the home front. Instead, the master narrative of the war is one of the triumph of American bravery and technology, two large components in America's image of itself. Thus the visual history created by photographs of war is a history that comes prepackaged. The narrative themes already exist and need only new images—similar to the older images but not identical—to revitalize them in the public eye.

Arguing along similar lines about culture and history, many historians and communications scholars turn their attention not to the world of still photographs but to full-motion video. While some newer scholars are beginning to consider the effects of the television news media on the construction of history, most focus on analysis of feature films and fictional television programming. Complementing Griffin's argument about photographs and mythology, and extending it to television news documentaries, Michelle Kendrick argues a similar point. The Gulf War, she states, conformed "to a narrative already written against the legacy of the Vietnam War," the latter defined as a chaotic, divisive, and filled with human suffering (60). The mythological images of the Gulf War are, Kendrick argues, constructed against the mythologized images of the Vietnam War. To argue her thesis, Kendrick analyzes two lengthy documentaries of the Gulf War: CNN's Desert Storm: The Victory and CBS's Desert Triumph. After carefully examining each, Kendrick concludes,
In neither video is there battlefield blood, bodily fragmentation of soldiers, or even any concrete physical evidence of their pain and suffering—except in the archival footage of the Vietnam War. In those instances when it is impossible to avoid talking about the allied dead, they are metonymically represented by a crushed helmet, an empty boot, or a piece of wrecked machinery. War equipment thus eclipses human bodies, shifting attention from the physical beings affected by the war onto the technology. (67)

While it is defined along traditional lines of heroism and sacrifice, the Gulf War is also defined in opposition a second set of images: the images of suffering and loss from the Vietnam War.

The process Kendrick describes is called reimagining, which is at the heart of my analysis in chapter four. As H. Bruce Franklin defines it, “The basic technique [is] to take images of the [Vietnam] war that [have] become deeply embedded in America’s consciousness and transform them into their opposites” (34). Thus in the CNN and CBS video presentations of the Gulf War, the suffering of soldiers in Vietnam could, by virtue of being juxtaposed with sanitized images of bravery in the Persian Gulf, be reimaged into a narrative of America’s greatness, of its overcoming the traumas of the past. As then-President George Bush called it, America had kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.

While analysis of the television news media’s effects on the construction of history are still largely unknown and unexamined, historians have long been concerned with the ways in which history is imaged and reimaged in films and on television (the
latter referring not to the television news media but to the fictional programming that
dominates most networks). This is especially true concerning the Vietnam War, a
conflict that grew as television grew, entered millions of homes nightly in the late 1960s
and early 1970s, and moved very rapidly into the arena of the feature film (with John
Wayne's 1968 *The Green Berets*) and the television program (CBS's 1987 *Tour of Duty*).
Because few historians distinguish between feature films and television programming, I
have chosen to consider both concurrently—and in light of the earlier discussion of
cultural narratives, myths, and images. I begin with an example from television and work
into a definition of visual history.

In 1987 I was in my late teens, and I watched the premier of *Tour of Duty*, the
first dramatic series to focus on the Vietnam War, on CBS. Thirteen years later, I still
remember a scene from the end of that episode: One soldier, Horne, was criticized
throughout the episode for wearing a peace symbol and for arguing against US
involvement in Vietnam. He consistently refused to fight. In the end, he was forced to
stab a Vietnamese soldier in order to save both his life and the lives of his friends. His
sergeant advised the stunned young man to use a gun the next time he decides to kill.
The episode ended, and here Daniel Miller's analysis augments my own memories, with
Horne screaming that "This war is wrong!" and his gruff sergeant responding, "Maybe,
but that's not the point" (180). *Tour of Duty* touted itself as historical and apolitical, as a
factual look at what really happened during the Vietnam War to the soldiers who fought
it. In this vein, then, the series confronted issues like racism, civil unrest, and drug abuse.
As it pursued these themes, the program, perhaps unintentionally, did two other things: celebrated the warrior and blurred some important distinctions.

As it confronts its issues, *Tour of Duty* follows "conventional narrative strategies in which [social problems] are either purged or resolved at the end of each program by heroic representations of an ultimately good system" (Miller 173). Representing this system is sergeant Zeke Anderson, nominally the main character of the series. Zeke makes things come out right in the end—killing the enemy, banishing the racist, saving the drug addict. Through Zeke and the characters around him, Vietnam is depoliticized and, instead, humanized. Complex issues become resolvable by quick plot turns, and no problem is too complex to be unsolvable by a man with a gun.

In Zeke, we see one danger of such a reimaging of the Vietnam War: Reality is "mediated, worked over, and described as truth [rather than as] partial truth. It is isolated from its historical and political contexts and is focused narrowly" (Miller 182-83). For example, the focus shifts from larger cultural issues surrounding race in America and its armed forces and is instead played out in the narrow interactions of Zeke and his cadre of soldiers. Such a narrowing leads, inevitably, to a celebration of the warrior rather than an understanding of the war. Blurring this distinction between warrior and war transforms a supposed homage to those who fought and died into an "homage to those who unquestioningly fought and killed" (Miller 185). In many episodes, including the premier, actual documentary footage is intermixed with scenes scripted specifically for the show. Such a move blurs the distinction between reality and fiction, but this blurring contributes to a very costly effect of a program such as *Tour of Duty* on its audience: It
separates its audience from the past, obscuring events by intermixing the real with the fictitious. An audience that learns its history of the Vietnam War from a program such as Tour of Duty is left in an isolated, depoliticized, ahistorical place where larger-than-life warriors solve watered-down versions of complex social problems.

In the end, Tour of Duty lasted only three years (1987-1990) and produced only 58 one-hour episodes. In that time it contributed greatly, however, to what Miller calls “a culturewide, cross-media proliferation of war imagery in the United States [that are] intertextually related [and which] tend to reinforce and to privilege certain meanings [of events] over others” (167). In this way, a program such as Tour of Duty contributes to the creation and maintenance of visual history, and it is to my definition of this term that I now turn. Specifically, I analyze the limited arguments about film and history presented by two historians, John E. O’Connor and Robert Brent Toplin, and conclude with my own summative definition of visual history and its place in the field of rhetoric and composition.

In Tropics of Discourse, Hayden White argues that “Every discipline, I suppose, is [. . .] constituted by what if forbids its practitioners to do. Every discipline is made up of a set of restrictions on thought and imagination, and none is more hedged about with taboos than professional historiography.” This limiting leads, White further argues, to “the repression of the conceptual apparatus” of historians (126). One apparatus that is suppressed within the field of history is that needed to analyze visual history. This suppression leads to very limited movement along some analytical lines—and the production of methodology that is vague and muddled in its composition. This is clearly
demonstrated by both O’Connor and Toplin. In “History in Images/Images in History,” O’Connor argues that “few historians think of film or television as anything more than lightweight entertainment [...] because of the absence of any accepted, coherent, and comprehensive methodology for analyzing them.” With this in mind, he advocates “teaching people to be informed, critical viewers of historical film and television” (1201). After this promising start, however, O’Connor devotes the majority of his article to discussing, in very general terms, the analysis of historical films, spending little time on a consideration of television.

Within his limited discussion of visual history, O’Connor raises two strong points and builds to a solid conclusion, despite his overuse of generalizations and mixing of the study of fictional films and television programs with the study of nonfictional works in each medium. Concerning the analysis of film, he argues that “The full comprehension of a film, for example, demands close consideration of camera angle, lighting, shot composition, editing, and the ways in which each of these and other elements of visual language add subtle (even unconscious) patterns of interpretation” (1204). Such a statement is severely crippled in two ways. Perhaps limited by his own training in the analysis of written records of the past, O’Connor’s suggestion about analyzing the totality of a film is hampered by the lack of concrete advice. He offers historians neither terminology nor methodology for doing the work he advocates. His suggestions also ignore the constructed nature of film itself. Analyzing camera angles and editing effaces both the camera operators and the editors. It effaces the human component to the production of film and leaves only the isolated artifact on the historian’s screen. This
disciplined isolation is reinforced when O'Connor lists a series of questions historians and their students should bring to bear on the historical films they view:

To what extent do [the films] seem to be based on the same level of research we expect to be the basis of good historical writing? What elements of historical interpretation are presented, either overtly in the narrative or characterization or more subtly through the *mise-en-scène* and visual language? How, if at all, does the film relate the past to the present (the period of the film's production)? How do the inherent limits of the medium restrict the ways that a story can be told or an issue addressed? [. . .] If fictional characters or story elements have been added, where does the history end and fiction begin, and to what extent do the fictional elements intrude on the historical material? How does the material and point of view presented conform with the available historical literature [. . .]? (1207-08)

Most of these questions are concerned with the text itself, with verifying its factual or fictitious nature. While he does offer one intriguing question about the limits of the film medium, the questions are all discipline-specific. They are bound to the historian's methodology and show no influence from either media studies or communication. Despite the limitations of his argument, O'Connor builds to a thoughtful and insightful conclusion, a conclusion almost entirely divorced from the argument preceding it:

Visual literacy is an essential tool for citizenship in contemporary America. It would be easy to teach students to be cynics (or to reinforce
them in their cynicism), but this would be neither productive nor educational. Not long ago, the naïve presumption was common that whatever people saw on the news they accepted as fact. Today, people are so ready to disbelieve news reports, and especially news analysis, that "media bashing" has become an effective political tool. (1208)

O'Connor wants desperately to teach students to analyze historical film and television. He wants to make students more able to participate in productive criticism of the films and television programs that are produced. But he seems to be spinning his analytical wheels, trapped within his own field and its methodology, seeing what is needed but unable to draw upon the methodologies of other disciplines to do it.

Although he is also bound by the conventions of his discipline, Toplin makes a much more detailed study of the filmmaker as an historian. Lamenting his field's shortcomings, he writes, "Unfortunately, the profession provides few tools with which to conduct an analysis [of film]. Not much has been done to articulate ideas about what constitutes good filmed history, what methods of visual interpretation deserve acclaim or a disapproving stare, or which liberties taken by producers are within the bounds of professional acceptance" (1211). Unlike O'Connor, Toplin immediately acknowledges the constructed nature of film in his analysis, focusing on both the producer and the artifact produced. In his analysis, two specific limitations of film are given special attention: issues of complexity and of partisanship. Films cease to communicate, Toplin argues, when they lose their audience "to confusion and boredom" and thus must present mostly familiar ideas and stories. To do otherwise is to invite disaster. One way in
which audience attention is courted is through limiting the scope of a film. Rather than presenting a complex chronology of events, films excite feelings and emotions, functioning "as poetry, not as an encyclopedia" (1212-13). This means, of course, that the ability of a film to relate history is, ultimately, as limited as the ability of science fiction to explain science.

Unlike O'Connor, Toplin also devotes much of his article to a discussion of television history. Specifically, he focuses on *Vietnam: A Television History*, a thirteen hour long series aired in 1983. In his analysis of this example, Toplin shows what he sees as the promise of such visual histories, texts capable of "encompassing a wide range of material and points of view" (1215). While the series was heavily praised, it was also criticized, especially by Vietnamese expatriots. They argued, for example, that "the film stressed Ho Chi Minh's nationalism over his communism, relied on propaganda for source materials, and depended heavily on a pro-communist Vietnamese translator and consultant" (1215). All of this controversy amounted, Toplin states, to a "truism." The film (and Toplin's repeated use of the word *film* to describe this television documentary shows a muddling of the media he analyzes) was biased, but, he argues, "No film on a controversial subject—or any book for that matter—can assume complete non-partisanship. The choice of interviews, the juxtaposition of words and images, nuances in the narrative, and other factors give the composition shape and potentially guide the viewer toward specific conclusions" (1216). Again, unlike O'Connor Toplin acknowledges that the production of visual history is about *choices*, choices made by people whose motives must be understood.
Criticizing film, as Miller criticizes *Tour of Duty*, Toplin argues, "[F]ilm displays significant inadequacies if it does not communicate some of the ambiguity and complexity of life. The causes of problems are not always so singular as films frequently make them, solutions not always so obvious, good and evil not always so stark" (1220). To combat this over-simplification, we must "recognize producers, directors, writers, and editors for what they have become—historians" (1226). For Toplin, this means the traditional historian must ask some questions of the visual historian: What historical monographs influence the filmmaker's interpretation? What films influence his/her presentation of that interpretation? Through such questions a deeper understanding of the visual history of film can be crafted—but only be intermixing filmography with historiography.

Toplin reaches a strong, reasonable conclusion based upon the argument that he makes, but it is a conclusion flawed by his own disciplinarity:

Historians have devoted considerable time to viewing film as a symbol that reflects the conscious and subconscious thoughts of people in earlier ages, but they have given surprisingly little attention to its promise and shortcomings in re-creating the past. Until they more aggressively judge the filmmaker as historian, they will leave much of the field of popular interpretation, by default, to people who operate free of the pressures that monitor scholarship. I am reminded of the words of a responsible filmmaker who expressed surprise at the latitude a producer enjoys in rendering history to the public. "Nobody is watching us," he said. (1227)
While his warnings to the field of history are certainly accurate, his final statement is flawed by his own concern with films trying to relate history accurately and responsibly. There are, of course, few (or no) scholars monitoring the development of historical films from any position of power, any position from which a change in methodology can be enforced. Scholars can criticize an historical film, but they are rarely in a position from which to guide its production. In this sense, the anonymous producer Toplin quotes is correct: No one is watching. But Toplin forgets a key component of visual history: the audience. When visual history is produced, either on film or television, the audience is watching—and learning, and remembering, and shaping their understanding of the world around them based upon what they see and how it relates to the present.

Ultimately, my analysis of the field of history has been harsh, perhaps, in accusing it of blindness towards the rhetoric of visual history. However, as my opening analysis of Vitanza and Bernhardt suggests, the field of rhetoric and composition is little better. Historians have a tendency to analyze film and television as isolated texts, as archival records comparable to traditional written records. Rhetoricians either analyze film and television through ancient terms and concepts or, more often, a mix of such ideas along with the methodologies developed by scholars in literature. In my presentation of Jarratt’s *Rereading the Sophists* and both Octalogs, I have attempted to show how history is both written and criticized in rhetoric and composition. But such historiographical methods are inadequate when attention turns to film and television. Similarities can be drawn between the visual and written media, but those similarities cannot be allowed to limit the analytical methodologies that develop. To augment our
approaches to the study of the past, I have turned to those scholars concerned with visual media.

To allow for study of television and film, the historiographical methods of rhetoric and composition must grow to include the study of visual history. As has been suggested throughout this chapter, visual history is the pictorial record of the past that is presented on film and television, in fictional and nonfictional programs. An expansion of the historiography of rhetoric and composition to include visual history must include two things: (1) an awareness of the people behind the scenes who make decisions about what will be filmed, how it will be shown, when, and to whom and (2) an awareness of the technical features of the visual images presented—including lighting, scope of shots, juxtaposition of images with narration, etc. Only by moving in directions such as these can scholars in rhetoric and composition begin to analyze visual history in its complexity. To further this discussion, I turn, in chapter three, to the extended analysis of two disparate examples of visual history at work on television—and a consideration of the conventions of the genre of televisual journalism itself.
IMAGES OF WARFARE: VIETNAM AS VISUAL ARGUMENT

In chapters one and two I summarized the positions that history is a narrative and that narrative is a form of argumentation. I analyzed the historiographical methods of rhetoric and composition, focusing specifically on *Rereading the Sophists*, and argued that a critical methodology capable of analyzing visual representations of history must be developed. In this chapter I bring these two threads of argument and analysis together and wrap them around visual representations of the past on television and the narratives in which these visuals are placed, primarily through analysis of two examples—a commercial for AT&T and local news coverage of the fighting in Kosovo. Although they are very different, these two examples exist within a specific frame of imagery interpretation: the genre of the Vietnam War text in post-Vietnam America. They are examples of imagery and interpretation set to guide the audience to action, either a purchase, in the case of the first example, or a refusal to support the US policy of interventionism in Kosovo (the second example). In this way, they are examples of what Carolyn R. Miller identifies as “a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action” (153). To illustrate this genre and its connection with social action, I turn first to a news story from the 2000 presidential campaign.

In August of 2000, Arizona Senator John McCain was diagnosed as having skin cancer. McCain’s health had already been an issue during the battle for the Republican presidential nomination earlier in the year, where opponents questioned both his physical and mental condition because of the more than five years he spent as a prisoner of war in
North Vietnam. Because of the cancer, McCain’s health—and history—were again big news. As it covered the story of McCain’s cancer, ABC News, and all other major networks, referred to one specific source to contextualize the issue. In a report published online, ABC News reported,

Michael Ambrose, a POW center doctor made available by the McCain campaign in December 1999, said the type of cancer McCain suffered before is usually due to sun exposure from years ago. He said McCain and his fellow prisoners were kept in the Vietnamese sun for long periods, though it is impossible to link the cancer to his POW experience.

Two important rhetorical moves take place in this short passage: The voice of authority is consulted for an explanation of the event, and a cause-and-effect relationship is implied between McCain’s time in a Vietnamese prison camp and his current cancer problems. Thus a specific narrative of the past is constructed, one in which McCain’s brutalization by the North Vietnamese leads directly to his current health problems; the past is narrated in a way that explains the present, with a specific interpretation of the past built into the narrative itself. (This is a convention of the genre of news reporting covered in more detail below.)

Unfortunately for ABC and the other news outlets who used this information, its credibility is in doubt. McCain and the other POWs held at Hoa Loa Prison were simply never kept out in the sun for long periods of time. As McCain himself states in another story about his time as a POW, “One thing I wanted to do was see the sun.” To explain his health problems, ABC created a version of McCain’s history in which his treatment
by the North Vietnamese led to his cancer, a history directly contradicted by another story told by ABC news. The history fell apart when McCain himself discounted it. To replace this faulty picture of the past, ABC turned to a different causation: “Melanoma is usually caused by exposure to the sun. Those like McCain who have fair skin have a higher risk. McCain spent hours in the Arizona sun campaigning for Congress in 1982 and subsequent years.” Rather than continuing to blame the Vietnamese sun, ABC News turned to Arizona—where the rate of skin cancer is among the highest in the world. While this history lacked the drama of the first—with its incarceration and implied mistreatment—the new history was credible. Experts discussed it, and McCain himself endorsed it, even presenting journalists at an open-air press conference in Phoenix with a basket full of suntan lotion with which they could protect themselves.

The story of McCain and his bout with cancer serves to illustrate the work of this chapter on the television and the creation of history begun in the previous chapter. To illustrate my argument about the uses of visual history, I analyze two very different examples. First, I examine an AT&T commercial aired on The Learning Channel during the premier of the series Vietnam: The Soldier’s Story. I conclude with an analysis of a segment from the ABC affiliate KGUN-9, in Tucson, Arizona, which analyzes the similarities between the then-growing Kosovo Crisis and the Vietnam War. Although the two texts have radically different purposes—the first to promote the use of AT&T’s long-distance service and the second to increase understanding of a confusing conflict—both employ similar strategies of narration and similar images from the Vietnam War.
I have chosen these disparate texts to illustrate a point about the uses of visual history. Images only contain meaning because of two things: their context, including the narrative frame into which the images are placed, and the ideology of the audience. Thus while pictures do have a connection to their referent, this connection is heavily mediated by the beliefs of the audience. Such a situation allows for, as Robert L. Craig argues, "a certain degree of free association in the process of interpretation" (37). This is especially true concerning American viewers and images from the Vietnam War—images long-ensconced within their own genre of limited interpretation and televisual mediation.

**AT&T: A Vietnam Narrative about Intra-Generational Communication**

Craig's argument about free association and interpretation of images is especially relevant to my first example: an AT&T commercial aired on The Learning Channel during the 1998 premier of a series titled "Vietnam: The Soldiers' Story" (see appendix A for a complete transcript of this commercial). The commercial draws on familiar imagery from the Vietnam War, particularly the movie *Apocalypse Now*, as it constructs its argument.

Because it is a television commercial, the text is inherently persuasive, although its argument does not advance through an overt chain of claim and support; the genre and medium demand such content. On the surface, the commercial argues that those who use AT&T will communicate better than those who do not—specifically, they will communicate better with members of their own family, even about issues traumatic and burdensome. For my analysis, I examine the text on another level: Covertly, this
commercial employs a narrative form, coupled with common images from other Vietnam War narratives, particularly film, to construct a familial history and then uses that history as the basis for an argument about communication.

The commercial opens on a river scene; jungle lines the shore in the background as a large boat moves along. The sun, reflected red on the clouds, rises or sets in the background. When the scene shifts to an interior shot of the boat, we see benches along each side of the vessel; Asian men and women of varying ages sit silently, their faces impassive. One figure stands out: An African-American man in his early twenties sits among the other passengers. The camera pauses briefly on other passengers as guitar music softly and slowly plays. The scene switches again to an exterior shot: Closeup on the young African-American man resting on his back, his hands folded behind his head. Dog tags rest on his bare chest. In the near background is the river; along the river is dense jungle. The young man rolls his head to the side, looking briefly at the jungle. By this point in the narrative, the audience has intuited two key points. The young man is a soldier and is in Vietnam. The fact that he is a soldier is made clear by the dog tags around his neck. His location is never clearly stated, but it is strongly suggested by both the frame around the commercial and the imagery employed.

The commercial is being aired during a documentary on the battle of the Ia Drang valley in November of 1965. This program provides the larger frame for the text. While the commercial prior to this one focuses on an investment service, the commercial directly following it advertises the next installment in The Learning Channel’s series “The Soldier’s Story,” titled “Under Siege at Khe Sanh.” Thus stories of the Vietnam
War surround this commercial, suggesting by association that it, too, is set in the former southeast-Asian war zone. The imagery used in the commercial reinforces this association.

The imagery shown in the first fifteen seconds of this commercial is very similar to images from Vietnam War films such as *Hamburger Hill*, *Missing in Action*, and *Uncommon Valor*. In these films, ships filled with American troops are shown traveling along rivers. The association is strongest, though, with the film *Apocalypse Now*, a seminal film in the genre of Vietnam War texts. This is especially true when we see the main character in the commercial, the young Black man, laying on his back on the deck of a fast-moving boat. Although the imagery from *Apocalypse Now* is dated—the film was released in 1979, nearly twenty years before this commercial aired—it is imagery that is commonly associated with the Vietnam War. More importantly, the images provide narrative fidelity, to use Fisher's term. The audience recognizes the images as images from Vietnam War stories and is able, then, to begin to make meaning out of the scenes that are being shown. Such associations are demanded, in fact, for the commercial's narrative structure would make sense only to an audience steeped in the images of Vietnam common to American popular culture. Taken together, the imagery and the frame leave an audience with little confusion about the setting for this AT&T commercial.

As the commercial continues, a series of images is rapidly shown that reinforces the connection to the Vietnam War; these images, coupled with the narration, construct the story this commercial tells. "Dad was here," the narrator, speaking as the voice of the
young Black man, states, triggering a series of images—each of which is left on the
screen for a varying amount of time. Six Asian children splash and swim near the river’s
shore; they wave towards the camera. A young girl, perhaps nine years old, rows by.

Both she and the older woman sitting in front of her look into the camera. The story thus
far is simply one of travel, of a man moving along a river. Twenty-three seconds into the
commercial, the river-narrative ends. Images of a squalid village begin to flash across the
screen: animal pens; dirty, barefoot children. The young man strides through the village;
he stops and, map in hand, asks an old man for directions. Ultimately he is shown, in the
last exterior shot of the commercial, sitting atop a hill. Jungle covers the hills in the
background and rice paddies are visible below him. He rests with his elbows on his
thighs, hands clasped. Throughout these scenes, the voiceover has continued: “[Dad]
ever talked about it much. Said you had to be there. Well, here I am.”

The scene shifts again, this time to the interior of a café or bar. The music, which
has been playing since the opening frames of the commercial ends. The young man is on
the phone to his father. As the two engage in a brief conversation, the story constructed
in this commercial comes to a close. “Ty? You still in Singapore,” the father asks.
“No,” the young man replies, “I’m on leave. I’m in Vietnam.” As the conversation
moves back and forth, the scene shifts radically between light and dark. The son stands
bathed in light, surrounded by white walls. The father stands in a dark hallway, cloaked
in shadows. He contemplates his son’s location for several seconds before responding:
“Vietnam? You want to talk about it?” The son grimaces, and, in a voice filled with
emotion, he answers: “Yeah, I do. I sure do.” AT&T’s logo, on a black screen, appears, the music plays for a few seconds, and the commercial ends.

An audience needs to do very little to construct a coherent, meaningful narrative from the images and narration in this commercial. The setting is clear from both the frame and imagery, and the son’s statements about his father having been to this place before serve to reinforce these visual and audio clues. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the son is visiting a specific place, such as a battlefield. The father never talked much about Vietnam—and the son never discussed his plans to visit Vietnam on leave, either. The two silences together suggest an emotionally-charged past, a buried trauma. When the father and son begin their discussion of the war at the end of the commercial, we are left with the idea that all of this hidden trauma will be worked out. The son understands his father better; this healing has, as the last line of the music played throughout this commercial suggests, “been a long time coming.”

For Americans—versed in the imagery of the Vietnam War perpetuated in popular culture—this narrative’s meaning is clear: The nation’s healing over the past twenty-five years has only just begun. The narrative is highly probable within this genre: A father goes to war and, upon his return, has difficulty discussing what he has seen and done. His son is curious; he joins the military, as his father did, and, when given the chance, visits Vietnam. The visit is an emotional one, and he feels the need to reach out to his father. There are no fantastic elements to the tale, and it rings true with other stories of war.
This text can only be understood, as Jameson argues, in its social and historical context. It is a commercial created more than two decades after the Vietnam War ended and aired during a documentary on a little-known battle. Without the culturally-understood imagery from the movies about the war filmed over the last twenty years, an audience would be unable to immediately pick up the threads of the story. Without the knowledge of the trauma of the war on both a personal and national level, the emotions shown by the young man on whom the commercial centers would make no sense. An audience lacking the social and historical "vocabulary" of this commercial would be unable to make sense of it, would be unable to construct a meaningful narrative. Unable to interpret the narrative, an audience would miss the commercial's arguments—that the Vietnam War was traumatic for America, that communication about the war will lead to healing, or even that AT&T is a fine company. This commercial creates an historical narrative about a father's trauma and a son's curiosity and uses it to put forth an argument about healing, communication, and the value of AT&T.

The narrative constructed by AT&T is not unique to the selling of telephone service, though. A similar Vietnam narrative is constructed by the television news media in times of national crisis—such as during the early days of the Kosovo crisis in 1999. Before I begin my analysis of such coverage, a number of forces at work on the television news media must be examined, for televisual news reporting is itself a separate genre. My analysis below focuses on a point where the two genres intersect, on a story about the fighting in Kosovo that is heavily mediated by common images and interpretations from the Vietnam War. While a television commercial such as that analyzed above operates
under a business-and-profit paradigm, visual history that is constructed by the news media operates under a much different presentation-of-objective-reality paradigm. I turn first to a consideration of the television news media, particularly the work of W. Lance Bennett and Walter Lippmann. Through their work I analyze the television news media in terms of the pseudo-reality it creates and the frames and filters affecting the stories that construct that pseudo-reality. Although Lippmann’s work is dated, and many of his claims have been refuted, particularly regarding changes needed to “fix” news reporting to the public, I have chosen to include him here. His ideas about the genre of news reporting itself are relevant to this discussion—and still remain as foundational thoughts within the field of journalism.

Filters, Frames, and Reality: Media Studies and the News as Genre

The analysis of the media is, at heart, as old as the debate over the nature of reality itself. The argument that the media are both reporting on and influencing the world around them has its roots in the arguments against the Sophists and their wily ways of making the worse case seem to be the better. At the beginning of the rhetorical tradition in the west, Plato and Aristotle worried about how a society could function when the majority of its citizens could be led more easily by the well-spoken than by the wise. In the Gorgias, for example, Plato’s Socrates states that in rhetoric “[T]here is no need to know the truth of the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know” (68). In such sophistry, Plato saw a great danger to
his society, for a search for truth could not easily be undertaken in a world founded on mere persuasion—a world caught up in the shadows and with its perceptions thus stuck in the cave. Two millennia later, Walter Lippmann, the founder of modern media studies, would echo this concern when he wrote that "the health of society depends upon the quality of the information it receives" (*Liberty* 72).

In the news media, Lippmann saw both the promise and the peril of democracy—the promise of an informed electorate, the perils of a misinformed electorate. Lippmann's work is ultimately focused on two important separations: the separation of the readers from the reality around them and the separation of the news-makers from the sources of their news. Concerning this second separation, Lippmann lamented the fact that most journalists were hacks, amateurs with no formal training in their craft, "untrained, accidental witnesses" to important events (*Liberty* 71). He hoped that schools of journalism could address this deficiency, but he saw no guarantee in education. Instead, Lippmann wanted a pool of experts to stand between the journalists and the facts that comprise the news of the day. Specifically, he saw these "expert organized reporters" as a filter through which information could be passed to reporters and then to the public (*Liberty* 81). These experts should, he argued, have "no horror of dullness, no interest in being dramatic, [the ability to] study statistics and orders and reports which are beyond the digestive powers of a newspaper man or of his readers" (*Liberty* 81-82). In short, these experts needed to exist outside of the genre of news reporting—outside of the norms and constraints under which the news is normally produced. Between the reporters and the newsmakers, then, there would be experts who read all of the available
data, analyze it, synthesize it, and report it to the journalists who then report to the public. Lippmann saw a need for these experts to filter the news because "the most destructive form of untruth is sophistry and propaganda by those whose profession it is to report the news" (*Liberty* 13). Trained experts could, he felt, avoid the pitfalls of reporting and get to the heart of a given matter, to the truth. Interposing experts between the events of the day and the reporters who explain those events to the public was especially important, Lippmann believed, because "The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event" (*Public 9*). If the coverage of the news is biased, then the images created in the public mind are also biased, and Lippmann found this unacceptable.

Even the best reporting, Lippmann argued, leads to

the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates. (*Public 10*)

The public acts on the world created for it by the media, a world rarely experienced directly and thus only imagined, a world Plato described through the metaphor of shadows cast upon the walls of a cave, shadows that were visible to an audience rather than the actual objects casting them. If this pseudo-reality is essentially in line with the reality it purports to represent, then sound decisions can be made in a democracy. If the
pseudo-reality differs from the world it claims to mirror, then the public is misled, either intentionally or unintentionally.

In late March of 2001, the national television news media were confronted by an event that was both interesting and worthy of reporting, complicated fairly seriously by the fact that it may not have actually happened: the arrest of former Yugoslavian president Slobodan Milosivic for war crimes. The story appeared on the Associated Press wire early in the day, reporting that an arrest had been made. Footage shown on Yugoslav television contradicted this report, showing Milosivic standing on his porch and waving to crowds of admirers. If the arrest had been made, then US aid to Yugoslavia would continue unabated; if the arrest was a fantasy, then it was likely that US aid would cease. The matter was left unresolved, leaving anchorman Peter Jennings to frame the story conditionally, with two competing “if-then” narratives, neither of which could be claimed as truth. As a second example of pseudo-reality misleading the public, consider the testimony before Congress of fifteen-year-old Nayirah, who claimed to be a volunteer at the al-Addan hospital in Kuwait when the Iraqi army invaded in August of 1990:

“'While I was there, I saw Iraqi soldiers come into the hospital with guns, and go into the room where 15 babies were in incubators. They took the babies out of the incubators, took the incubators, and left the babies on the cold floor to die'” (qtd. in MacArthur 58). This was the infamous atrocity story that led the US public, in part, to support military action in the Persian Gulf.

Later, long after the bombs has stopped falling on Baghdad, holes began to appear in Nayirah’s story. She was, for example, not a disinterested witness to the invasion of
her country; she was, instead, the daughter of Kuwait's ambassador to the United States, Saud al-Sabah. None of the groups concerned with human rights, such as Amnesty International, had heard of these alleged atrocities until Congress heard them and CNN reported them. Few people knew that Nayirah had been coached by Hill and Knowlton, a public relations firm hired by the Citizens for a Free Kuwait (MacArthur 50-51; Rabinovitz and Jeffords 12). More than ten years after the Gulf War ended, few people know that the testimony concerning babies, incubators, and atrocities was a complete fabrication. Young Nayirah said it, the media reported it, and the public believed it—believed it enough to go to war. The reality of the invasion of Kuwait was overshadowed by the pseudo-reality, enough that the latter has, for the general public, replaced the former entirely. While an event such as this could accurately be characterized as a deliberate lie, such problems occur for less insidious reasons as well. Specifically, the translation from the events of the day to the pseudo-reality that is imagined by the public can be influenced by the biases of the reporters and the filters through which news stories must pass.

Concerning the stories that do ultimately reach the public, Lippmann noted that “The high lights and the disputes and sensational incidents are noted” while the other events of the day go unreported (Liberty 80). Carr and White acknowledge that the narrative of history is composed of selectively chosen events; Lippmann extends this argument to the news media, arguing that only events containing conflict are ever reported. Elaborating on Lippmann's point, Thomas E. Patterson argues,
It is commonly said that the news is about events, and this is true in a limited sense. Yet events must also have a defining attribute if they are to make headlines. This attribute is newness—not just in the sense of being recent, but also as a departure from the ordinary. A family quarrel is not news—unless it ends in a homicide. (Out 135)

Here Patterson is speaking of media coverage of political campaigns, where the conflicts are covered and the issues are left to languish. His statements are especially true, though, concerning the swirling, chaotic, dramatic melee of warfare. Congressional hearings take place daily, but few are televised on major networks—unless they concern alleged sexual harassment by a nominee to the Supreme Court, conspiracy by high-ranking Marines and shady arms deals to rebel forces, sexual impropriety on the part of a sitting President, or atrocities committed by an aggressive enemy army. Such events are breaks from the norm, and they are thus deemed more newsworthy.

Because the media focus on conflict and events that are outside of the norm, a specific kind of pseudo-reality is created, one in which danger is magnified greatly and every warning is a major warning. In such an environment, Patterson argues, the pseudo-reality leaves the public jaded toward both the media and the subjects they report: “Like the boy who cried wolf, the press has an audience that no longer responds to its warnings” (Out 174). To draw the audience back in, then, the media must continuously find greater and greater conflicts, even if those conflicts must be imposed. For example, in December of 2000, during local television news coverage in Washington, DC, of a multiple homicide at a software company, a reporter speculated on the cause of the
shooting (which had taken place only minutes earlier). Perhaps, she argued, the shooting was the result of a love triangle involving coworkers. The reporter had no reason to suspect such a motive, but the suggestion gave both narrative and dramatic conflict to a breaking story. Further elaborating on the difficulties inherent in how reporters report the news, W. Lance Bennett argues that there are two basic working conditions of reporters which lead to the creation of a skewed pseudo-reality: the routine practices of the media and professional norms and codes of conduct that surround these routines.

"Organizational routines give the news both its reassuring familiarity and its economic viability as a product in a competitive marketplace. Professional norms enable journalists to make personal decisions and justify what they do" (Bennett, News 117). Both have direct consequences on the picture of reality created by the television news.

As with any job, reporting the news involves a set of routinized tasks that vary only slightly depending on the nature of the event being covered. Acting on these tasks, and the people who perform them, are three basic pressures: pressure from the sources of news, pressure from the news-gathering organizations, and pressure from other professional reporters (Bennett, News 119). Reporters are beholden to their sources of information; receiving a scoop on a given story can make an individual’s career. Being left in the cold while other reporters receive information quickly leads to unemployment. Thus reporters must often cooperate with the official sources of information concerning a given story if they (1) want to receive any information about that story at all and (2) if they hope ever to receive information from a given source again. The result of this pressure is standardization of information, from official sources or semi-official "leaks."
Reporters are also pressured by the organizations for which they work. As Bennett asks, and answers,

Why do editors, publishers, and TV news producers favor formula stories [from official sources] and just-the-facts reporting of official events? In part, because standardized news is safe. People in managerial posts in news organizations must constantly compare their product with that of their competition and defend risky departures from the reporting norm.

(News 123)

Even if a reporter does deviate from the accepted practice by receiving information from a nonofficial source, the story she gathers may never appear because it deviates too much from the standard fare.

Coupled to this pressure from editors and official sources is pressure from other reporters—leading to pack-journalism. Reporters, unlike most professionals, share extremely close quarters: They work together, eat together, sleep in the same hotels, drink in the same bars, interview the same people, write about the same events, wait together between events, scramble together to meet deadlines, and are pressured by the same outside forces. In such a close environment, it should be no surprise that reporters cover stories in nearly identical ways. Such standardization leads to identical coverage of events, but it also leads to noncoverage of events.

As an example of these pressures at work, consider the events leading to the impeachment of President Clinton in 1999. Various reporters knew of Monica Lewinsky and/or the audio tapes made by Linda Tripp. They knew of other alleged marital affairs
by the President. But the stories never aired. The story that would lead to impeachment broke on “The Drudge Report,” an online news magazine with no traditional editorial constraints—and pressure to be shocking and new rather than pressure to be safe. Only as the story gained momentum did other news organizations join the coverage—and, ultimately, join the feeding frenzy. Each news organization reported the same shocking events, quoted the same torrid passages from *The Starr Report,* and showed the same basic footage from the impeachment hearings. In the end, the reporters involved seemed to come to an unspoken agreement: the Republicans were to blame, Clinton was a careful liar, and the event was no longer worth reporting.

Beyond the pressures affecting individual reporters and the constraints of their professional practices and norms, there are four basic biases that affect which stories successfully reach the public: (1) Human triumphs and failures are easier to report than complex socioeconomic phenomena; (2) to be reported, events must be easily dramatized; (3) stories are isolated from one another and must be able to fit into this fragmented pattern; and (4) official, authoritative, normalized interpretations of events are privileged. Applied to the media in a general sense, these biases lead to a narrative structure such as this:

Something has gone awry in the world today, but officials are hopeful that the situation will return to normal soon. And now, for a report from the scene, we go to... The plot thickens when different officials disagree about what measures are appropriate to the restoration of normalcy. But
the outcome is almost always the same: Some official action wins out, the
day is saved, and the story ends with a return to "normal."

(Bennett, News 40-41)

Each of these biases has an effect on the news that is reported—and thus on the pseudo-
reality that is created in the minds of the public. For each bias, it is important to consider
both its cause and its effect.

Bennett defines this first bias in news coverage

as the journalistic bias that gives preference to the individual actors and
human interest angles in events while downplaying institutional and
political considerations that establish their social contexts. Surrounding
this human interest core, the news is further personalized by emphasizing
the personal impact of events on the audience and by personalizing the
relationship between the consumer and the news product. (News 48)

Reporting that follows this pattern appeals to the public on an egocentric basis,
encouraging an emotional connection between the individual and distant figures and
events rather than a rational, analytical response. Personalized news has a serious effect
on the pseudo-reality it creates, leaving the public in a "fantasy world . . . like those of
play, sport, or fiction [that] can involve people intensely on [only] the basis of catharsis,
escape, hope, or sheer entertainment." The pseudo-reality of personalized news is one in
which deep, meaningful understanding of large events is severely hampered and political
agency is crippled (Bennett, News 51). In the world created by personalized news, the
public is left to its individual responses, individual emotional reactions and connections, and individual sense of inaction and inability to influence the world in which they move.

Beyond the bias of personalization in the news is the dramatization of the news, wherein "those aspects of events are selected that are most easily dramatized in short capsule "stories."" Put simply, the events most easily dramatized are the events most likely to be reported—and thus to become news. This dovetails with the tendency to personalize the news, for personal conflicts are the stuff of drama (Bennett, *News* 40, 52).

There are two main effects to the dramatization of the news: limitation of coverage and trivialization of topics. Coverage is limited to the most dramatic of conflicts and the most dramatic of "actors." Thus a few members of Congress will dominate news of government, and battles over complicated political, social, or economic issues becomes battles between one highly visible personality and another. With this limiting of coverage comes trivialization of that coverage. Events that contain no inherent drama of their own will have the makings of drama grafted onto them (Bennett, *News* 56-58). Thus a relatively unglamorous vote in the Senate over a banking bill may, in the news, make the President angry (personalizing the event) and cause him to lash out verbally at Republicans (a dramatic response). These are two important aspects of the genre of televisual news reporting, and they lead to other consequences.

When the news is both personalized and dramatized, information becomes fragmented. As Bennett argues,

News fragments exist in self-contained dramatic capsules, isolated from each other in time and space. The impression given by the news is of a
jigsaw puzzle that is out of focus and missing many pieces. When focus is provided, it is on the individual pieces, not on how they fit into the overall picture. (News 58)

A typical news broadcast jumps from topic to topic, sometimes focusing on a cluster of stories on a single issue but normally moving in a seemingly random path. In the first few minutes of the televised news, viewers are likely to hear about some breaking news story; some accident, natural disaster, and/or crime; the weather of the day; the weather to come; and a teaser for upcoming news of sports, medicine, and/or technology. Neil Postman characterizes this fragmentation of the news as “Now . . . this” coverage:

“Now . . . this” is commonly used on radio and television newscasts to indicate that what one has just heard or seen has no relevance to what one is about to hear or see, or possibly to anything one is ever likely to hear or see. The phrase is a means of acknowledging the fact that the world as mapped by the speeded-up electronic media has no order [. . .]. There is no murder so brutal, no earthquake so devastating, no political blunder so costly—for that matter, no ball score so tantalizing or weather report so threatening—that it cannot be erased from our minds by a newscaster saying, “Now . . . this.” (Amusing 99)

Fragmented coverage is news reported with neither rhyme nor reason—beyond the dictates of the market and the medium. Fragments of news—properly dramatized and personalized—attract audiences, but they come with costs. Justifying this fragmentation, journalists will argue that, according to their professional norms, it is inappropriate for
them to comment, to offer analysis. When no analytical framework exists, though, news stories depend "more for credibility on American fear, fantasy, and stereotype" than on anything else (Bennett, *News* 61-62). Reporters and editors must report narratives that ring true with other narratives in the culture in order for an audience to be able to make sense of the events being described.

As these fragmented stories are reported, dramatized and personalized, complex relations between events are ignored. Events occur without cause and disappear without effect. In a climate such as this, the Clinton administration can begin funding SDI, a relic of the Cold War not seen since the end of the Reagan years. The focus on this missile-defense system begins again for no apparent reason and continues with no critical analysis. Like other events in a fragmented world, it simply is. When events rise and fall in this fragmented setting, explained in self-contained dramas that are coherent unto themselves, Americans are left with "a diminished sense of our own history as a nation."

As the present is further fragmented and isolated, events simply happen, and the past that led to these events becomes more cloudy. As Bennett argues, "History marches on, while the American people follow behind in confusion" (*News* 63).

Fragmented news stories, personalized and dramatized, are also normalized—familiar images and patterns emerge to help the audience deal with a chaotic world wherein change is the only constant:

Following the outbreak of crisis or change, the whole drift of news imagery is toward the familiar and normal. Will our world be OK? Will the problem be solved? More important than a close look at what the
problem is, or whether the solution really makes sense, is the reassuring
pronouncement by an official or an authority that things will work out and
life will return to normal soon. Thus the fourth major information bias in
the news is the tendency to filter new information through traditional
values, beliefs, and images of society and to deliver the filtered
information through the reassuring pronouncements of authorities charged
with returning things to normal. (Bennett, News 65)

Rather than focusing on the chaos, the news focuses on official interpretations of the
chaos. Political analysts explain the workings of the run for the Presidency; retired
military men offer explanations for current conflicts. Lawyers explain the justice system.

The cost of normalized news is twofold. First, it biases the news in favor of
official sources of information. During the Gulf War, for example, military experts were
the primary source for analysis of the events in the Persian Gulf. The view of the War,
then, was skewed towards military matters. In such an interpretive climate, the War was
most likely to be understood as a martial event rather than a social, economic, or political
occurrence. This understanding was normalized by the news coverage of the events.
Instead of presenting facts upon which the public can base decisions, the normalized
news “helps people confirm their favorite political truths because those truths form the
implicit guidelines for selecting and writing news stories [...] Stories move from truths
to fact, not the other way around” (Bennett, News 71-72). Drawing on familiar
metaphors and plot lines, the media relate the news of the day with its normalized
interpretation already encapsulated: The invasion of Kuwait becomes an event akin to
the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; events in the former-Yugoslavia conjure images from the Holocaust; America’s enemies all resemble Hitler. Thus normalized news removes the pseudo-reality created by the media even further from the world in which the audience lives—and in which political agents make their decisions. Rather than attempting to report the brute facts of existence, an endeavor that may simply be impossible within any genre, the news reports on a world that careens wildly from one crisis to the next, while always offering comforting interpretations and, in the end, a conclusion in which things—whatever those things may be—return to normal.

**History Makes the News: Kosovo as Vietnam Revisited**

The forces acting on the genre of televisual news reporting, forces based in the members of the news media and in the medium in which they work, are both centripetal and centrifugal—centrifugal as they spiral outwards looking for new stories to tell, centripetal as they pull those stories in towards a routinized practice of reporting and interpreting the events. To illustrate the forces—and filters—at work, I turn to local, Tucson, coverage of the Kosovo Crisis in 1999.

In March of 1999, the USA and its allies began bombing targets in the former Yugoslavia. These bombings were, in part, meant to halt the ethnic cleansing—the most recent euphemism for genocide—taking place between the Albanians and the Serbs. As it had happened during the Gulf War, military experts offered interpretations of various events. Another normalized interpretation of the events was also regularly offered: comparisons to the Vietnam War. On March 31, 1999, on the 10:00 PM edition of the
news, K-GUN 9, the local ABC affiliate, offered an example of such coverage in a piece titled “Comparisons” (see Appendix B for a complete transcript of the story).

On the night “Comparisons” aired, the lead story on the 10:00 PM news concerned not the growing war in Kosovo but the body of a baby that had been found stored in a freezer at a local funeral home—for approximately three years. After more than three minutes of coverage (15% of a 21-minute program that includes roughly nine minutes of commercials), the focus shifts to Kosovo. Specifically, reporter Monica Shuman details the plight of the refugees who are fleeing Kosovo and the problems neighboring countries are experiencing as they deal with this flood of humanity. Roughly six minutes into the broadcast, “Comparisons” begins.

Visibly, the story is framed by Colleen Bagnall, one of the anchors for KGUN-9 news. Dressed in a dark coat and light shirt, she both introduces and concludes the story. In her introduction, she makes it very clear that the past is being used to interpret the present: “Some military veterans look at Yugoslavia and see their past. They say the fighting there reminds them of a war they fought and lost: Vietnam. Tammy Vigil talks to one veteran who draws some haunting comparisons between Yugoslavia and Vietnam.” The interpretation of events unfolding in Kosovo is made clear already through the statement that Vietnam was a lost war. The purpose of such a statement in this context is, perhaps, to heighten the drama of the story. The relentless bombing by the allies and the river of refugees were, by March 31st, already old news. To build tension, Kosovo is immediately framed in this story as another potential lost war.
Rather than approaching this story in a complex manner that takes into account various political, cultural, and economic factors, "Comparisons" personalizes its topic in the figure of Denny Evans, a veteran of Vietnam. Denny was nineteen when he served in Vietnam—as were many veterans—as a combat medic. To introduce Denny, we are shown a picture of him in Vietnam, dressed in his uniform and standing beside a friend; after the audience has had roughly six seconds to examine him in this setting, a current image of Denny is shown. He sits center screen, with the camera looking up at him. As we watch, he thumbs through a stack of old photographs, examining each in turn.

After a few seconds the view shifts, and Denny's photographs dominate the screen. The camera focuses on one after another: The first shows a helicopter either landing or taking off from a brown, rocky field. The second shows a group of soldiers in green fatigues gathered together, sitting cross-legged on the ground. The third shows a smaller group of soldiers, three or four, sitting with a board in front of them, possibly playing a game of dice. The final picture shows a young soldier in green pants wearing no shirt. The camera has captured him as he walks toward it. He holds a circular hoop in his hands. Sandbagged bunkers are visible behind him. While Denny is clearly marked in the first photograph the audience sees, this sequence of photos is anonymous. Denny may be in them, or he may have been the photographer—or perhaps neither. The audience can assume that the photos show Denny's friends, but there are no clear statements to this effect. Instead, the audience is cued to remember some of the common images from the Vietnam War—young men gathered together, sandbagged bunkers, helicopters flying about. As Denny examines his photos—and the audience examines
them with him—Tammy Vigil, the reporter covering this story, offers this voice-over narration: “31 years later he thumbs through memories that still torment him today—memories that he says mirror the fighting in Yugoslavia.” Unlike Colleen Bagnall, Tammy Vigil has no need to mention Vietnam by name—the pictures speak for her. She does allude to the trauma of Vietnam by referencing Denny’s haunted memory, hinting at the slant that the coming story will take (and echoing the anchor’s introduction). In the first thirty seconds of the story, it has been both personalized and dramatized. Denny Evans is the haunted veteran of a lost war; he sees comparisons between his experiences in Vietnam and the war in Kosovo. Now that these elements have been established, and the structure of the compare and contrast story has been set, the story can move into its clear back-and-forth of Kosovo and Vietnam.

There are, ultimately, three comparisons offered between Kosovo and Vietnam. First, as the audience is told in a voice-over, “As in Vietnam, American forces are facing hardened, experienced troops protecting their homeland.” Like Vietnam, the early days of the Kosovo conflict are dominated by an air war, by a bombing campaign that is “destined to fail” because the mountains of Yugoslavia are as rugged as the jungles of Vietnam were dense. The third comparison concerns time: The conflict in Kosovo began long before US forces became involved. As each of the comparisons is made, the scene switches between Denny speaking to the camera and shots from the war in Kosovo. The audience sees bombed cities, burning buildings, fleeing refugees, and other scenes from Kosovo—all narrated by either the image of Denny speaking or a voice-over. As the pictures flow past, he argues, “We’ll be going in there and fighting in their own back
yard and they're gonna protect it, they're going to defend it. [...] We can bomb the heck out of them, and they're still going to feel the same way. And like in Vietnam, we bombed them tremendously, and we ended up losing.”

After these comparisons are made—by both Tammy Vigil and Denny Evans—more photographs are shown: In the first photo, six young men pose for the camera. Three are white and three are Black; all are dressed in green fatigues. Two sandbagged bunkers are visible in the background, as are two more soldiers (one, possibly, with a radio on his back). The second photo shows a series of bunkers in the foreground, a helicopter in the near background. Men are loading or unloading the helicopter. Rifles, tarps, and other gear are strewn about. The third photograph shows a young man leaning against the sunken door to a bunker. Dressed in fatigues, a cigarette is in his right hand and his left is on his hip. He looks blankly toward the camera. As with the first series, all of these photographs draw on canned images of the Vietnam War—helicopters, bunkers, young Black and white men engaged in the business of war. Over these photos, though, a different narrative is laid.

When the first series of photographs appeared, they were framed as Denny’s haunted memories. Now Tammy Vigil offers a different mode of analysis: “Denny wouldn’t wish another Vietnam on his worst enemies. He says that’s exactly what will happen if this war goes to the ground.” Following this statement—and the series of photographs—Denny is shown once more. The camera zooms in until his face dominates the screen. Tears in his eyes, his voice choked with emotion, he speaks for the last time: “It’s scary to think about more US troops having to [very long pause] get killed. I don’t
want to see it happen.” While Denny sheds his tears, the personalized and dramatized aspects of this story reach their highpoint. Denny weeps for the past and for Americans who may be killed in the near future. Kosovo has been “exposed” as another Vietnam—or a potential Vietnam. The story is not about economics, culture, or politics; it is about Denny Evans, personal loss, and the dramatic potential for disaster.

As this personal drama plays out, the hopelessly fragmented nature of the story is exposed as well. Almost nothing about the fighting in Kosovo is explained. The audience may intuit that the US (and possibly some allies) are bombing various targets; the fact that a civil war rages in Kosovo at this time is not mentioned. Genocide, controversy about allied aggression, and other topics are duly ignored. “Comparisons” is isolated from the subject it covers, ultimately offering no information—and only vague warnings of dire events to come.

In addition to being isolated from its stated topic, “Comparisons” is also isolated from the past. The story is supposed to be a comparison between the growing war in Kosovo and the American war in Vietnam. The comparisons made are superficial at best, but the conclusion drawn from these shallow comparisons is alarming. The audience is left fearing that the war in Kosovo is another Vietnam in the making, but what exactly “another Vietnam” really means is not explained—beyond the idea that tremendous bombing of someone’s homeland will lead to an American defeat. “Comparisons” is an orphan, isolated from both the present and the past. The comparisons between Vietnam and Kosovo that are offered can only build to the conclusion that Tammy Vigil and Denny Evans offer by drawing on the normalized interpretations of the Vietnam War.
The audience must understand the Vietnam War as a traumatic, terrifying affair, as a war that cost thousands of young men their lives in a sacrifice that led, in the end, to a complete defeat. If the audience is cued to think these things by the photographs shown and the narrative that is offered, then the conclusions reached in “Comparisons” seem appropriate, perhaps even logical.

As the story ends, the audience is left with a shot of Denny Evans’ face: Near tears, he is barely able to raise his head to the camera. Closing the story, the image shifts back to the anchor’s desk, where Colleen Bagnall sits. She states, “Denny Evans says whatever happens with the Kosovo Crisis, he still supports our troops 100%, and he hopes all of us will. He says the lack of support is what hurt so many Vietnam veterans.” In her introduction to this piece, Vietnam was a lost war; in her conclusion, the Vietnam veterans were hurt by those who did not support them. Both of these are common figures in arguments about Vietnam. The slogan she refers to—either deliberately or inadvertently—is from the Gulf War: Support Our Troops. While the audience is told that this is Denny’s position on the Kosovo Crisis, it is, by virtue of its juxtaposition with the Gulf War, also the official government position. Colleen Bagnall offers an analysis of the situation that is both normalized—in that it is the position espoused at the time by all official government sources—and personalized. Denny Evans supports our troops, even though he fears another debacle like Vietnam.

A story such as “Comparisons” uses visual history to make its argument. It relies on the fact that the audience will have overwhelmingly negative feelings towards the Vietnam War, so those emotions need only to be tapped. The argument functions on a
purely emotive level, more through the photographs from the Vietnam War than through the footage of the current war in Kosovo. By using the pictures of, the audience assumes, Denny and his friends, a narrative of the Vietnam War is constructed in which young men fight and die, and even the survivors bear scars for the rest of their lives.

A clear, rational argument is never made in “Comparisons.” Instead, emotional images are used to both personalize and dramatize a superficial set of historical comparisons between two dissimilar wars. The story is fragmented, for it neither adds to nor builds on any earlier stories concerning the situation in the former Yugoslavia, relying instead on its audience’s associations with common Vietnam War images (and the negative connotations such images often bring). In the end, normalized interpretations of both the current war and the “lost war” are offered. By normalizing interpretations of both the present and the past, “Comparisons” both uses history and makes history. In this story, the Vietnam War is a defeat, a haunting and costly disaster; no other interpretation is offered, and, within this framework, no other interpretation is possible.

Conclusion: News Made-to-Fit

Narrative structures, limited by the genre in which the narrative exists—a genre controlled by professional norms and the medium-related issues discussed earlier—dominate the television news. While “Comparisons” is an example of a story that, upon unfolding, is forced into a specific mold, there are also times when the narrative of the news is predetermined by those who cover it. Discussing coverage of the peace
conference at the end of World War I, Lippmann relates a story that sheds light on
"Comparisons":

I remember one reporter who was detailed to the Peace Conference by a leading news-agency. He came around every day for "news." It was a time when Central Europe seemed to be disintegrating, and great doubt existed as to whether governments would be found with which to sign a peace. But all that this "reporter" wanted to know was whether the German fleet, then safely interned at Scapa Flow, was going to be sunk in the North Sea. He insisted every day on knowing that. For him it was the German fleet or nothing. Finally, he could endure it no longer. So he anticipated Admiral Reuther and announced, in a dispatch to his home papers, that the fleet would be sunk. And when I say that a million American adults learned all that they ever learned about the Peace Conference through this reporter, I am stating a very moderate figure.

(Liberty 70)

Lippmann's anonymous reporter knew ahead of time what story he wanted to tell—the dramatic story of the doomed German fleet. This was all he wanted to learn at the Peace Conference, and it is all he was interested in reporting to the public at home. The German fleet had been, throughout the war, an object of hatred and fear for the allies; now the story had an end—an end the reporter had decided on before he told the story or learned anything about it.
Nearly eighty years later, Joseph N. Capella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson tell a similar story about television coverage of American politics: In 1994, after a Republican majority was elected to Congress, newly elected Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich visited the Clinton White House. In their meeting, Clinton and Gingrich agreed on nearly every issue they discussed; both leaders described the meeting in glowingly positive terms. When they spoke to reporters, Clinton and Gingrich were immediately asked, “What do you think [this cooperation] will break down over?” Gingrich responded angrily to the reporter’s question: “[Y]ou just heard the leaders of the Republican Party say that the Democratic President had a wonderful meeting on behalf of America; we’re trying to work together. Couldn’t you try for twenty-four hours to have a positive, optimistic message as though it might work?” (3-4). As with Lippmann’s fleet-obsessed reporter, those covering the meeting between the leaders of the Republican and Democratic Parties had their own ideas about how the story would be told. Based on a history of noncooperation, the reporters assumed that the story they were telling could have only one possible end: failure.

Ultimately, “Comparisons” fits this same mold. The Vietnam War and the Crisis in Kosovo are to be compared. Striking visuals from both are employed, of course, but the visuals are employed to construct a very specific interpretation of the past: Vietnam was an American defeat, so Kosovo is a potential defeat. Only days into the war, the reporters are predicting a bloody, humiliating end. The entire narrative was already set, and it needed only to be properly personalized, dramatized, and interpreted for the audience.
‘NAM MYTHOLOGIZED: THE PRISONERS AND THE POISONED REIMAGED

In the previous chapter I analyzed two radically different examples of the reimaging of the Vietnam War in American culture—an AT&T commercial and local news coverage of the Kosovo crisis of 1999. Both of these examples functioned, in part, by simple association: The images in the commercial and the news report were drawn from a common cultural store of Vietnam-related imagery, particularly films such as Apocalypse Now. These associations were made to suit corporate and narrative needs, but neither the commercial nor the news report could function without these associations. Both are built within an established genre of image and interpretation and are understandable to an American audience because of this.

In chapter four I extend this argument outwards. I begin by analyzing the creation and maintenance of two separate—yet related—cultural images within the genre of the Vietnam War text: the American prisoner of war (POW) in southeast Asia and the specter of the Vietnam veteran psychologically damaged by wartime experience and physically poisoned by exposure to Agent Orange. These two examples are particularly important, for they appear heavily in both post-war coverage concerning American relations with Vietnam and in media coverage of the aftermath of the Gulf War. Both are part of an ongoing mythologizing of the past that is used to argue about present conditions and future actions. Specifically, it is a mythology wherein the trauma of the past is reimaged to suit current needs: the Missing in Action become Prisoners of War and are the basis for all current-relations between the US and Vietnam and the damaged,
poisoned veterans are ignored as the issue of Agent Orange's damage shifts from them to the people of Vietnam and the environment in which they live. They are texts within this genre that exist at the point where intention and effect meet (Carolyn Miller 153). To illustrate this influence of the past upon the present, I conclude by analyzing an ABC news report from November of 2000 concerning President William Jefferson Clinton's visit to the Republic of Vietnam.

Within the context of my argument about genre and interpretation, it is important to establish the meaning of myth. For my definition, I first turn to H. Bruce Franklin's work *MIA or Mythmaking in America*. He writes,

> I use the term *myth* in its fundamental and rigorous sense, to refer to a story of ostensibly historic events or beings crucial to the world view and self-image of a people, a story that, no matter how bizarre it may seem from outside that society or when subjected to rational analysis, appears as essential truth to its believers. (6)

Within this frame, myths play both positive and negative roles. While they "can play a positive role in society by helping a people create a common sense of who they are [and] establish the boundaries between who and what the people [. . .] are not," they also demonstrate the exercise of power by reinforcing the ideology of the dominant cultural group (Lembcke 8). Ultimately, I use the term *myth* not in a disparaging sense as "a story that is the core of someone else's religion [. . .], the essence of a religion in which you don't believe" (Franklin, *MIA* 8). Instead I use *myth* to refer to these common cultural
stories that, true or false, are widely accepted as true and used as the basis for arguments about the meaning of the past and its importance for current decision-making.

In an earlier chapter I discussed the myth of babies being dumped from their incubators by Iraqi soldiers during the invasion of Kuwait. This story is widely accepted as truth and has been used for more than ten years to help justify a war. During the Gulf War, another image was crafted and entered into the canon of Vietnam mythology: the image of the veteran spat upon by protestors upon his return from the Vietnam War. While it is not my purpose here to interrogate this myth, it is worth briefly examining, for it encapsulates the two images I analyze later in this chapter. Like the AT&T commercial and the KGUN-9 report, the spitting image is constructed against a specific cultural background. In the New Testament, for example, Luke writes of Christ's accusers spitting upon him. After World War I, stories of German veterans being spat upon fueled patriotic sentiments and the rise of Nazism. In America, during the 1960s and 1970s, proponents of the Vietnam War often spat upon protestors, while no records exist of returning veterans ever being spat upon by opponents of the war (Lembcke 6). Yet the latter image persists and is, in fact, accorded factual status by most Americans—and even the veterans of the Vietnam War themselves.

The fact that the spitting image exists mythically rather than in reality is an important distinction, for “myth is less about something that did or did not happen than about the belief that it did” (Lembcke 5, 1-10). This particular mythical image is an example of what H. Bruce Franklin refers to as reimaging. In reimaging, the “basic technique [is] to take images of the war that [have] become deeply embedded in
America's consciousness and transform them into their opposites" (MIA 133). In this case, the heavily charged and divisive images of protest against the war in Vietnam were reimagined, particularly in movies such as *Coming Home* (1978) and *Tracks* (1977), to show veterans being spat upon rather than showing the protestors themselves being spat upon by hawks who supported US intervention in Vietnam. Each of the myths I analyze below—the POW and the veterans poisoned by Agent Orange—are constructed similarly to the spitting image.

The two myths I analyze in this chapter are integral parts of America's understanding of both the Vietnam War experience and the Gulf War; both are, in fact, foundational figures in the entire genre of Vietnam War texts. Images of prisoners of war and soldiers crippled by exposure to Agent Orange are so pervasive in American culture that they are rarely interrogated. Ultimately, I argue that these myths limit the discourse that can take place about both the past and the present by recycling the same images again and again on film and television screens. It is on these screens that the myths of Vietnam are continuously reconstructed and reimaged for post-Vietnam America, and no figure is more commonly seen inhabiting this mythical landscape than the prisoner of war, the "pure, brave, dedicated, American hero who defeats evildoers by virtue of his superior skills and high moral purpose" (Gustainis 137).

**MIA/POW: Mythology and Argument in America**

I came of age in an America obsessed with the Vietnam War, especially in films and on television—a time when the conventions for this new American genre were being
established. While controversy raged over topics such as the layout and design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the wording of President Reagan's speech wherein he referred to the Vietnam War as a noble cause, the most common topic of argument by far was the fate of the American missing in southeast Asia. My friends and I watched *The Deer Hunter, Uncommon Valor, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Missing in Action, Missing in Action II: The Beginning*, and countless other lesser-known films that featured Americans held prisoner in Vietnam both during and after the war. We read about *The Executioner* and his return trips to Vietnam to find the American missing—along with similar pulp serials such as *MIA Hunter, Able Team, Phoenix Force, and SOBs: Soldiers of Barabas*. We displayed the official MIA/POW emblem on our school books and never questioned the existence of these men—and the depravity and cruelty of the Vietnamese. That we believed all of this is not surprising; we were young, and the images were powerful. While this belief that my friends and I held is gone, deflated by our abandonment of mythology as an interpretive frame, it is surprising that these images continue to wield great power in this culture, and the belief in Americans still being held prisoner in Vietnam is still pervasive. To understand the power of the POW image, the image itself must be seen in its larger cultural context, must be seen not as a new, post-Vietnam War creation but as "an image already prefigured in American culture by captivity myths dating back to the Puritans," as a part of a genre of American captivity narratives that is as old as America itself (Gruner 26).

The earliest American literature focuses on captivity narratives, particularly the stories of Mary Rowlandson and John Williams. Both detail the inhumane treatment
these two colonists suffered at the hands of Native Americans and are constructed as examples of divine testing, of good versus evil. This structure was a common allusion in sermons in early America, and, in the years immediately preceding the American Revolution, it became a metaphor for the colonies' existence under British domination and a major component of the genre of the American captivity narrative (Gruner 28-29). Franklin, in *Prison Literature in America*, argues that the captivity narrative, especially the slave narrative, "was the first genre the United States contributed to the written literature of the world" (5). Combined with other narratives, such as John Filson's adventures of Daniel Boone, captivity became a staple in the narratives of the American frontier—of the meaning of America itself.

The conflation of the Puritan captivity narrative with the narratives of Manifest Destiny and the struggle on the frontier is an important one for the development of the POW image within this genre, for it taps directly into what sociologist James William Gibson calls America's warrior dreams. Gibson argues that

This culture has two fundamental stories, one celebrating the individual gunman who acts on his own (or in loose concert with other men); the other portraying the good soldier who belongs to an official military or police unit that serves as a representative defender of national honor. And these mythologies, sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing, have at different times defined the martial mentality of the country. (17)

As examples of such "times," Gibson refers to both factual and fictional Americans: the guerilla fighters of the American Revolution, the frontiersmen who fought the Indian
Wars, the Buffalo Bill novels of Edward Judson, the legendary Rough Riders, and even the paramilitary Ku Klux Klansmen of *Birth of a Nation*. The POW embodies both traditions—strong and pure, a member of a large military group forced by circumstances to face evil alone (evil embodied in his captors, defined explicitly in movies such as *Full Metal Jacket* as playing the part of the Indians).

While Gruner and Gibson ground their arguments in the history and literature of the American nation, both also see the modern warrior, and particularly the POW, as a construct of film, a creation of the entertainment industrial complex and an extension of the character who has always dominated this genre. As I argued in chapter two, the imaging of warfare existed long before the modern era. But warfare in the latter half of the twentieth century occurred at the same time that the technology of the entertainment industry was coming into its own. This growth in the technology of imaging and mass production of entertainment allowed twentieth-century warfare to be imaged on a grand scale. The POW figured prominently in the imaging of this genre, especially after World War II.

The POW experience was a major component of America’s involvement in both World War II and the Korean War. From 1940 to the end of 1945, 93,941 Americans were held prisoner in the European theatre, 25,600 were held in the Pacific theatre; between 1950 and 1953, more than 7,000 Americans were captured by the North Korean and Chinese armies (Doyle 560-61). Combined with the 4,120 POWs from World War I, then, the first half of the twentieth century saw more than 130,000 Americans suffer as prisoners of war. The rest of America experienced this suffering through film—and this
heavily-moderated experience would form the foundation for understanding the POWs of the Vietnam War.

Within this genre, television programs such as “Hogan’s Heroes” and films like *The Great Escape* (1963) fictionalized and romanticized the POW experience of World War II. Other films in the genre included *First Yank into Tokyo* (1945), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *The McKenzie Break* (1970), *Von Ryan’s Express* (1965), *The Secret War of Harry Frigg* (1968), and *Stalag 17* (1953), to name only a few. Korean POWs were featured in films such as *The Bamboo Prison* and *Prisoner of War* (1954), the latter starring Ronald Reagan who vouched for the authenticity of this representation. More than thirty years later, Reagan would vouch for the accuracy of another POW film: *The Hanoi Hilton* (1987). While there were exceptions, as the list above suggests, most films of the POW experience prior to the 1970s focused on the second world war. They focused on the heroism of the prisoners who resisted, the daring of the prisoners who escaped, the tragedy of the prisoners beaten and killed by the Germans and the Japanese. The films fit into clear narratives of American goodness overcoming the depravity and inhumanity of the enemy. Such themes played poorly in representations of the Korean War, although they were ultimately made to fit within the genre.

Few films focused on the Korean War POWs, for the popular perception was that American POWs had “caved,” had somehow betrayed their nation—an idea with no home in the heavily patriotic genre of the American captivity genre and its absolute faith in God and country. Stories of torture and “brainwashing” were far less appealing than tales of the WWII POW’s bravery and ingenuity. As Gruner writes of *Prisoner of War,*
Despite lavish promotion, the film failed miserably at the box office. It failed for many of the same reasons that representations of the Vietnam War would fail to capture audiences in the 1970s: no one wanted a reminder of recent experience—especially failure. It was fine to examine and even entertain with an experience from World War II, a war that had clear winners and losers. Experiences in Korea and Vietnam provided no such comforting conclusions. (12)

American understanding of the POW experience began as a narrative of faith, of the Puritans overcoming the dark forces in the New World—personified in the figure of the Native American heathen. Three hundred years later, the story had changed little: Pure-hearted Americans were still seen to suffer at the hands of their evil enemies. Such a simplistic understanding based upon the image of Americans always overcoming their opposition was ill-suited for explaining the experiences of first the Korean War POWs and, later, the prisoners of the North Vietnamese.

Films such as The Deer Hunter (1979) and Hanoi Hilton (1987) follow the traditional pattern of foregrounding the ingenuity, bravery, and basic humanity of the American prisoners while thoroughly demonizing the North Vietnamese, part of a long tradition of “cinema avoiding political and historical complexity in favor of ideological interpretation” (Williams 130). The vast majority of POW films focused on Vietnam follow a different—yet no less ideologically-bound—pattern wherein Americans are held captive long after the war’s end in 1973 and must be rescued.
It is worth noting that *The Deer Hunter* reimages one of the most recognizable images from the genre of Vietnam War texts: the photograph of the assassination of a National Liberation Front prisoner by General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, head of South Vietnam's police/intelligence force. In February of 1968, this image ran in American newspapers, showing the General holding a revolver to the head of a prisoner. The picture was snapped at the moment the trigger was pulled, and the concussive force of the bullet striking the prisoner on the right side of his head is obvious; ten years later, the image resurfaced in a reimaged form in *The Deer Hunter*. In 1979, the reimaging of this famous shot showed not a US ally arbitrarily killing a bound prisoner but instead showed sadistic North Vietnamese soldiers forcing American prisoners to play Russian roulette. As each American soldier would place the gun to his temple, the North Vietnamese would place wagers on whether a live round was or was not in the chamber of the weapon (Franklin, “From Realism” 33-35). While the original image was disturbing for Americans, the reimaged version contained no ethical ambiguity. And fit much more cleanly into the story of American bravery and communist depravity.

By ignoring the realities of the past—most notably the fact that no successful rescue of Vietnam POWs ever took place, either during or after the war—POW films focused on the Vietnam War are able “to achieve a mythical victory years after the conflict’s resolution” (Williams 117). They transform the Vietnam War, a conflict that defies traditional patterns of narration with its nebulous beginnings and unsatisfactory end, into a more acceptable story wherein righteous American boys are beaten down by their enemies but saved by a Ramboesque patriarchal figure in the end.
Few images can successfully compete with this narrative of American captivity. David Cline, a leader of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, succinctly summarizes this powerful story and its relationship to the genre within which it exists: "Americans want to believe that we were the good guys and those rotten gooks are still making our boys grow rice" (qtd. in Franklin, MIA 6). In this statement, made during a phone interview, Cline unwittingly weaves several threads of the Vietnam War genre together. The image of the American as hero, the casual racism and dehumanization common in POW films and literature, and the Otherness of the Vietnamese (represented in the rice they still force American soldiers to farm). Built in film against a backdrop of the Puritan captivity narratives, the powerful image of the American POW serves political groups to this day.

The belief that Americans are still held prisoner in southeast Asia is a common one. In 1987, *Life* magazine ran a cover story titled "MIA: Are Any Still Alive?" in which twenty-five cases where the missing were possibly still alive were presented (Ehrenhaus 10). A 1991 survey done jointly by *The Wall Street Journal* and NBC News found that 69% of Americans believed that US soldiers were still held prisoner in Vietnam, and 52% of those surveyed believed that the federal government was not doing enough to expedite their return (Franklin, MIA xv). The only flags to ever fly over the US Capitol building are the Stars and Stripes and the POW/MIA flag. Formal relations between Vietnam and America are still strained by the operating assumption that either live Americans are being held in Indochina or the fate of the approximately 2,255 Americans unaccounted for at war's end in 1973 is being suppressed there.
No facts support the existence of live POWs, and the US demand that Vietnam provide a “full accounting” for all of the missing is unprecedented. No such similar demand was made of the Axis powers after World War II, despite the fact that more than 78,000 Americans were still classified as MIA. No such demand was made of North Korea during or after 1953, even though more than 8,000 MIAs were listed. Yet Vietnam’s full accounting for the American MIAs is a conditional starting point for current negotiations. The reasons for this obsession with American MIAs in Vietnam are legion. In part, the MIA/POW myth may survive because it strikes such a powerful cultural chord, drawing upon captivity narratives at the heart of American literature. The myth may also persist because of the closure it makes possible by reimaging the Vietnam War as a victory of American heroism over the depraved Other. The myth of the missing is also fueled by the power it conveys to some groups of activists, most notably the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia.

The most direct way in which the League has controlled the MIA/POW issue is through the manipulation of language. Few politicians would choose to appear callous and unresponsive in the face of the grieving families of the still-missing, and this reluctance has shaped official US policy concerning this issue. Policy statements on the fate of the missing in southeast Asia have progressed from the clear articulation of the belief that no evidence exists to support the League’s claims to “the possibility cannot be ruled out” that these survivors exist to the assumption “that some are still alive” in captivity (Isaacs 129). As my analysis of the ABC report on Clinton’s visit to Vietnam in
2000 suggests, this coalition of grieving families wields power over US foreign policy more than twenty-seven years after the Paris Peace Accords.

At the same time that the shift from a belief in no live prisoners to the assumption that such men do exist has occurred, a powerful reimaging has also taken place. At the end of the Vietnam War, 2,255 soldiers were unaccounted for; 1,095 of them were never considered to be Missing in Action; they were, instead, classified as KIA/BNR: Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered. Thus only 1,160 Americans were ever listed as MIA from the war in Vietnam. Originally, none of these men were designated as POWs, a category that was, historically, very different from MIA (Franklin, MIA 11-16).

The Vietnam-related films of the 1980s reimaged the missing from the Vietnam War into the live prisoners of the sadistic Vietnamese communists. Films such as Hanoi Hilton focused on the cruelty of the enemy, but films such as Uncommon Valor, Rambo: First Blood Part II, and the MIA series featuring Chuck Norris focused on the fate of the supposedly missing. In all of these films, brave American soldiers were abandoned by their government and left as captives in southeast Asia. This abandonment extended to a coverup, then, in which the prisoners were deliberately hidden from the American public—a group already accustomed to misinformation from the federal government in relation to Vietnam.

This reimaging of the missing as live POWs is best demonstrated in the MIA films and in Rambo. In both films, a powerful American hero, a former POW himself, is sent to Vietnam to find live prisoners years after the war's end. Both heroes are, from the outset, supposed to fail; the bureaucrats behind the scenes orchestrate events in such a
way that the hero will fail in his mission and thereby reinforce the official argument that no prisoners exist. Of course, the heroes in these films—and in all others in this subgenre—succeed; despite the machinations of both the US government and the Vietnamese, live prisoners are found. More specifically, live prisoners *who were classified as Missing in Action* are found. Of course, these films end with the rescue of the American prisoners and do not dwell on the political and military implications such a discovery may set in motion. As Tony Williams argues, "This nostalgic clarion call [to patriarchal heroism and innate American goodness and superiority] ignores continuing past and present historical complexities. It actively attempts to deny them any avenues of contemporary expression" (114). The image of the POW controls the language by which Americans know the Vietnam War, and therefore any competing interpretations of the past in which the POW does not exist are silenced. Men known to be dead whose remains were simply never recovered become the tragic heroes in a captivity narrative involving heroism in the face of evil and betrayal.

Thus as the official language about the missing from the Vietnam War was in flux, the image of the MIA as a living prisoner was busily being crafted in popular films. Coupled with the prevalence of the MIA/POW flag on a national level, the political pressure brought to bear by the League of Families, and the sale of paraphernalia such as bracelets bearing the name of a soldier listed as MIA by the League and the Victory in Vietnam Association, the missing have been reimaged into a powerful weapon. All current relations between America and Vietnam are filtered through this issue, and the demand for a "full accounting" is regularly renewed.
In 1993, for example, “an Australian researcher claimed to have found an old 1972 Russian translation of a North Vietnamese document indicating that the Vietnamese never returned several hundred American POWs.” Even though analysts pointed out many discrepancies in the “proof” of Vietnamese duplicity, then-President Clinton “refused to lift the eighteen-year-old trade embargo against Vietnam, and U.S. representatives serving in international development agencies were told to continue voting against financial assistance [for Vietnam]” (Gibson 300-03). The power of the POW image controlled the debate over aid to Vietnam, and only many months after the issue faded from the public mind were sanctions loosened. As long as the POW was kept in the spotlight, kept center-stage in the debate, relations between the two nations were at an impasse.

More important than the demand for an accounting and the emergence of faulty “evidence” of surviving POWs is the fact that the unfounded belief in live American prisoners in southeast Asia has completely replaced the reality of both the history of the Vietnam War and current international relations between the former combatants. The POW is an undeliverable commodity, a figure existing only as an image, a rhetorical basis for argumentation. As Jean Baudrillard writes, in the context of the Gulf War and its preponderance of images, “On the available evidence […], we could suppose an immense promontional exercise like that one which once advertised a brand-name (GARAP) whose product never became known. Pure promotion which enjoyed an immense success because it belonged to pure speculation” (29). The POW fits this mold in two important manners. First, the POW is a figure of speculation, one constructed in
the public mind primarily by film, national confusion and grief, and shifting official
culture; for groups such as the League of Families it is necessary for political survival to
keep the POW image in the foreground of Vietnam-US relations. The promotion of the
POW image keeps the issue alive—while shifting the impossible responsibility for a full
accounting to a former enemy who is seemingly willing to accept the rhetorical burden
for producing physical proof of the unprovable. Within this closed-world, the myth of
the POW is self-promulgating: Because Americans believe in the existence of live
prisoners in southeast Asia, they demand a full accounting for the soldiers officially
designated as Missing in Action. Because the Vietnamese cannot produce a full
accounting for all of the American missing, the belief in live POWs persists.

Reimaging Agent Orange: Effacing the Veteran with the Vietnamese

While the pure, noble POW serves as a representation of the soldiers who did not
return from Vietnam, those who did return face a different set of images, and the image
of the Vietnam veteran as damaged-hero is common within the genre of Vietnam War
literature. On one hand, the “damage” the Vietnam War caused American veterans is
psychological, and this aspect of the war is often played out in film. In the Vietnam-
related films discussed earlier the Vietnam veteran is mentally disturbed and unable to
cope with the day-to-day world after his wartime experiences. As J. Justin Gustainis
writes of the heroes of The Deer Hunter and Apocalypse Now, the “two major films about
Vietnam portray the figure of the Green Beret as a damaged hero—a man who is highly
skilled at the tasks of the frontiersman, but who is also alienated from his own people by
the experience of Vietnam" (142). The heroes in each film are so troubled by the past, in
fact, that they must return to Vietnam rather than live in America. Both of these films are
set during the Vietnam War, and both appeared near the end of the decade in which the
war ended, 1978 and 1979, respectively. Later, in the 1980s, films such as Platoon and
Full Metal Jacket portray the trauma of war on characters as they live—or die—with
the war itself; movies such as Born on the Fourth of July and Heaven and Earth echo the
post-Vietnam trauma first seen in the films of the late 1970s. Despite the acclaim all of
these films were afforded, none of them can compete with the hero of David Morrell's
1972 novel First Blood: John Rambo.

The character of Rambo is introduced to most Americans in the film First Blood, where, wronged by a small-town sheriff, he embarks on a killing spree which results in both the death of the sheriff and the destruction of the town. The damaged-veteran motif is played out in the ruins of the town's police station, as Rambo sobs to his friend and mentor Colonel Trautman of the deaths of friends in Vietnam and the ways in which he was reviled upon his return to America. While it is not a Vietnam War film, First Blood is, rather, a Vietnam veteran film, a subgenre in which the war itself is labeled as a great wrong and laid at the feet of past and present politicians while the veterans are identified as being both good and right, soldiers on a righteous mission betrayed on the home front. At the same time that the war is reimages as a noble cause, the veteran is portrayed as a savage outsider, an Other now incapable of living among normal citizens.
As John Hellmann writes of such films, "The Rambo films are indisputably revenge fantasies, and both the superhuman masculine power conferred upon Rambo and the cathartic violence characterizing his responses to wrongs are a transparent, and disturbing, strategy of compensation for postdefeat feelings of frustration and inadequacy" (140). Films such as those in the Rambo and MIA series, and even *Uncommon Valor*, highlight the mental trauma suffered by Vietnam veterans while simultaneously imaging them as highly skilled men capable of completing impossible tasks. Like the frontier hero discussed earlier in relation to the genre of American captivity narratives, the Vietnam veteran must live outside of society, forced into this existence not by a lust for adventure but by the psychological trauma of the past. As these films construct the Vietnam veteran, a physical cost is often attached to military service during the war, along with the psychological pain of PTSD.

At the beginning of *First Blood*, Rambo’s search for an old friend ends abruptly when he learns that the man, Delmar, has died: “Cancer. Brought it back from ‘Nam. All that Orange stuff they spread around. Cut him down to nothing.” These words conjure a specter as common as that of the Vietnam veteran suffering from post-traumatic-stress disorder: the veteran dying from exposure to Agent Orange. As Faris R. Kirkland writes, “Veterans who served in Vietnam faced unique biological and psychological problems. The most serious and widespread biological matter was exposure to dioxin in Agent Orange, a defoliant sprayed by aircraft”; the effects of such exposure include skin lesions, loss of feeling in the extremities, liver failure, and various cancers (753). This argument is echoed by virtually every other writer concerned with
veterans' issues, and the Department of Defense does in fact officially recognize dioxin poisoning as the cause of multiple ailments among Vietnam veterans and make disability payments to these veterans.

Between 1962 and 1970, as the major component of Operation Ranch Hand, more than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed on the jungles of Vietnam, primarily to deny the enemy the protection afforded by the dense jungle canopy. Since the end of the war, the focus of the debate over Agent Orange has primarily concerned the American veterans. This figure appeared again in the wake of the Gulf War, as veterans of that conflict began to argue for disability payments for the crippling yet nebulously-defined “Gulf War Syndrome”; their arguments were often advanced through direct comparison with the victims of Agent Orange.

In recent years, the reimaging of Agent Orange has begun to build momentum, primarily through a direct refocusing of American attention on the Vietnamese rather than American victims of dioxin poisoning. This reimaging has taken place in an environment in which relations between the US and Vietnam are stumbling towards normalization, and it effectively effaces the American veterans’ suffering and highlights the trauma dioxin has wrought in the Vietnamese people and the environment in which they live. To illustrate this reimaging I turn now to “A Closer Look: Vietnam,” a report aired on ABC Nightly News on November 16, 2000 (see Appendix C for a transcript of this report). I turn first to the mythical qualities of this report.

For an argument to operate as a myth, a specific condition must be met: The argument must contain contradictory premises that go unquestioned. The image of the
Vietnam veteran spat upon by protestors directly opposes the image of the veteran actively protesting American involvement in Vietnam; the two exist simultaneously in the American mythos of Vietnam. The belief in the existence of live POWs in southeast Asia persists despite the complete lack of any credible proof of their existence; in fact, the belief seems to continue because of this lack of proof. Within the myth of the missing, the absence of evidence and the repeated denials of the Vietnamese serve to reinforce the image that Americans still languish in communist captivity. Both myths contain contradictory premises—and belief in both is persistent and unflagging despite the contradictions. Within this framework, argument about Agent Orange also functions as a myth. The belief that US soldiers have been physically damaged by exposure to this herbicide is absolute; disability payments are made based upon this belief. To question this medical “fact” is tantamount to an act of heresy, a further unnecessary blow dealt to veterans who have already suffered much. In “A Closer Look: Vietnam” the contradictions within the myth of Agent Orange are exposed.

Midway through the report, a string of images of US soldiers in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s appear: A young soldier fills a large tank with a hose, soldiers in a jeep spray the foliage around them with a white mist, US airplanes and helicopters fly low over dense jungle trailing a herbicide-mist. All of these images show American soldiers engaged in the process of defoliating pieces of Vietnam with the herbicide Agent Orange; such footage regularly appears in stories supporting the claim that veterans have been harmed by their close association with this toxic substance. In this report, though, the images supporting Vietnam veterans’ claims are immediately followed by a
contradiction. After the segment centered around file-footage of Agent Orange ends, American ambassador to Vietnam Pete Peterson is shown speaking into the camera. In a roughly chopped sound bite he argues, “No one knows [the effects of dioxin poisoning on people and the environment]. It just isn’t known. Given time, I think we’re going to be able to come to a conclusion.” The contradictory claims are clear: The effects of dioxin poisoning on American soldiers are clear and above reproach. For this group, close association with Agent Orange had a crippling, often fatal, effect. For the Vietnamese, no such claim can be made; the issue is still in doubt. As Mark Litkey reports, “Vietnam has asked for help with scientific research, the cleanup of contaminated areas, and aid for the care of victims. But the US has been reluctant, saying that there is still no firm scientific evidence that these terrible afflictions were caused by Agent Orange.”

The effects of dioxin poisoning on both the Vietnamese people and the ecosystem in which they live is unknown, and any link between Agent Orange and physical maladies in Vietnamese people are suspect. Contradictory premises such as these cannot exist in a logical argument; exposure to dioxin either is or is not harmful for the human body. Yet both claims do coexist, even within this short report. That American soldiers handled Agent Orange is established by the footage that is shown; that these men are acknowledged as being disabled because of exposure to Agent Orange is an established fact within American culture. Within this report, the American veterans themselves are effaced as part of the construction of these contradictions. Rather than focus on them, or even upon the devastated landscape of Vietnam, a reimagining of the Agent Orange issue takes place. At the same time that the damaging connections between dioxin and the
Vietnamese people are questioned by ambassador Peterson, the only US official quoted in the story, the focus of controversy within this issue shifts from disabled American veterans to the children of Vietnam.

After all of the introductions have been made—including shots of President Clinton descending the steps of Air Force One to meet with various Vietnamese dignitaries—the first image from Vietnam appears: A child swings rapidly back and forth in a hammock as his mother sings to him. This image is bookended by images of warfare and Agent Orange. Both before and after the child is shown, US warplanes are shown spraying the Vietnamese jungle. Together, these images are the core around which the rest of this report condenses: Vietnamese children and the massive spraying of Agent Orange by the US military.

While the first child shown in this story is on the screen only briefly—and is not obviously handicapped—other images of children are given far more attention. From the images of planes spraying herbicide, the scene fades to an interior shot of a hospital. The camera focuses on the deformed legs of a child, slowly panning upwards to his vacant, twisted face. Other images of toddlers suffering from physical and mental handicaps rapidly flash by, reinforced by the voice-over of correspondent Mark Litkey:

Now, three decades on, Vietnam says this is the human fallout, an epidemic of miscarriages, rare cancers, and appalling birth defects affecting thousands of people. Vietnam is convinced that these children are just the latest victims of the deadly chemical dioxin in Agent Orange which seeped into the soil and poisoned the food chain. A couple with
two disabled children says America should bear some responsibility for this tragedy.

As this final statement is made, the camera focuses on a young Vietnamese couple holding two children, both of whom suffer from obvious physical handicaps. They wriggle weakly in their parent’s arms as the scene shifts again.

Images of children in hospitals dominate the last half of this report. Following more footage of US soldiers spraying Agent Orange, the picture switches to a young Vietnamese nurse tending to a child. A hospital hallway is shown next, with eight or more children rapidly moving towards the camera: one child employs crutches, for he has only one leg; two others balance on stumps that end above the knee. As the body of this report ends, the camera returns to images of children in the hospital: A toddler labors up a flight of stairs, aided by a nurse. Dressed in a shirt and pants decorated with pink and white stripes, she appears sad and unsteady on her feet. In another shot, a young mother cradles a boy while a doctor holds his hand. The boy’s arm is twisted and deformed; the camera pans upwards, focusing on the boy’s face which bears the unmistakable stamp of terrible physical and mental disability. The final scene focuses on a child’s crippled feet as they move through slow, laborious steps. From this painful image, the scene fades back to Peter Jennings in the ABC newsroom.

In this reimaging of Agent Orange, the only American authority who appears is ambassador Peterson. Mark Litkey, the reporter, is shown very briefly. No American veterans disabled by Agent Orange poisoning appear; US soldiers are shown only in footage from the past—shown, specifically, spraying Agent Orange across the
Vietnamese countryside. Other than these few exceptions, the body of the report focuses on Vietnam, particularly upon children. The physical trauma of dioxin poisoning shifts from an issue focused on US veterans to an issue focused on the children born long after the war—and it accomplishes this shift within a mythical framework that denies the poisoning by Agent Orange on the one hand while reinforcing the belief in dioxin poisoning through the repeated images of soldiers spraying it upon the jungle and children suffering from cataclysmic birth defects.

“A Closer Look: Vietnam” ends with a turn to another myth. As Peter Jennings closes the story, he states that “None of the Vietnam veterans groups here have official positions on compensation for the Vietnamese. The American Legion said it would be more inclined to support it if the Vietnamese government fully accounted for US servicemen still listed as Missing in Action.” Here the two myths draw together: Vietnam veterans groups, who lobbied for official recognition of Agent Orange as the cause for the maladies of many of their members, do not recognize the Vietnamese claims that parallel their own. As a condition for even considering such a claim, the Vietnamese must first account for all of the Missing—most of whom can never be accounted for satisfactorily, for their MIA designation exists only within the mythology of the Vietnam War.

This report from ABC News also demonstrates the way in which the past exerts pressure on the present. The most important aspect of this story should have been President Clinton’s visit to Vietnam, the first such visit since the war ended. Instead, Jennings’ introduction fixes the focus of the story firmly on the past:
Mr. Clinton is the only President to visit Vietnam since the war ended twenty-five years ago. Bill Clinton opposed the war on principal and avoided military service for himself. Though he was under some pressure on this trip to apologize for America’s conduct during the war, he will not do so. And we are told that the Vietnamese do not expect an apology. But there is unfinished business. Between 1962 and ’72, the US sprayed ten million gallons of the herbicide Agent Orange, containing dioxin, on Vietnam to defoliate forested areas. The Vietnamese are convinced, as are many Americans, that Agent Orange lives on in lethal ways.

In this introductory monologue, the familiar figures from the Vietnam War emerge: draft dodging, dioxin poisoning, mistakes that may demand an apology. In his conclusion, Jennings raises another specter: the Prisoner of War. All of these images are at work in the American memory of Vietnam; indeed, they dominate the discourse, focusing attention on specific interpretations of the past and thereby limiting the possible range of ideas and issues.

Of such troubling memories, Homi Bhabha writes that “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (63). For America, discussions in the present are controlled by the perceived traumas of the past. As A.J. Grant writes of such controlling myths, echoing the words of Lembecke from earlier in this chapter,
Admittedly, religious and secular [myths] present us with a kind of
double-bind—on one hand they provide people with a sense of history and
identity, on the other they are often exclusive and generally stand in the
way of dialogue among participants of different stories. Moreover, the
culture wars engendered by mutually exclusive metanarratives too often
erupt into shooting wars. (71)

Current US-Vietnamese relations are framed not as new beginnings but rather as sites
where old narratives continue to be played out. President Clinton’s move towards
normalization became, instead of a step forward, a turn back to past traumas involving
American prisoners, Agent Orange poisoning, and the continued reimagining of issues that
refuse to be moved from their positions of dominance in American debate over the
Vietnam War.
In 1986, Stephen Bernhardt argued that "Classroom practice which ignores the increasingly visual [. . .] qualities of information exchange can only become increasingly irrelevant" (77). In this chapter I argue that sustained criticism of visual texts in writing classes has, in fact, been marginalized—to the detriment of both our students and our profession. To advance this argument, I weave several separate threads together. First, I briefly consider the ways in which computers have become a major focus of the field of rhetoric and composition while television, a more common and much older technology, has been nearly ignored, although the analysis of film receives some attention in professional journals. I analyze several undergraduate writing textbooks that focus on visual texts, from photography to television to the Internet, and make recommendations about graduate education in visual rhetoric, particularly the study of television. I conclude with a call for future research into representations of teachers, especially English teachers, that exist in American culture, the most damaging being those images constructed by the news media in relation to issues of large-scale assessment.

Over the course of the last decade, those of us in rhetoric and composition have adopted the computer into our classrooms on a grand scale. Sometimes this adoption has been marred by uncritical enthusiasm and a lack of forethought. Larry Beason describes such an occurrence:

Not long ago, a writing teacher told me how hard he and his department had worked to obtain funding for a computer-equipped writing classroom.
These teachers were so caught up in making the appeal that they neglected to prepare for what would happen once they actually got what they wanted. They received a roomful of handsome computers but did not fully understand how to incorporate them meaningfully into the teaching of writing. [. . .] The computer desks were permanently arranged in ways that made group work difficult. The teacher's use of computers actually interfered with learning—not because of technology per se but because of the lack of planning and training. (25)

Such events are, to a greater or lesser extent, inevitable, but by and large the steps writing programs are now taking are more careful and considered. Much of this consideration has been focused on the Digital Divide, on the inequities that currently exist in access to new technologies for various social classes and ethnic groups.

In *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion*, published in October of 2000, Secretary of Commerce Norman Y. Mineta writes in her introductory letter that this report "shows that not everyone is moving at the same speed [into the digital age]." Nationally, 41.5% of homes both contain computers and have Internet access; in rural areas, this percentage drops by several points. Other groups are even less well represented among the ranks of the computer-literate: Only 21.6% of disabled people have Internet access, particularly those individuals with visual disabilities, and sixty percent of disabled people report that they have never used a computer. This is a percentage only slightly better than the 23.5% of Blacks and 23.6% of Hispanics who lack Internet access. A clear divide exists between groups likely to have computers and
Internet access—Whites with moderate to high income—and groups lacking this access. This situation exists at a time when, the report states, "Internet access is no longer a luxury item" (xviii). It is, instead, a necessary component of social advancement.

The understanding that computer literacy is of primary importance in the modern job market permeates writing programs at the post-secondary level, where the push to computerize composition classes has gained great momentum over the past decade, coupled with the promotion of critical literacy and the seemingly ever-increasing demand for students who are proficient technical writers. As Barbara Blakely Duffelmeyer argues,

Critical literacy is an awareness of the forces that affect the micro- and macrolevel conditions within which we acquire literacy and of how we view the uses and meaning of literacy. Today, the presence of computers in our culture and in the educational system that functions to reproduce that culture creates multiple literacy requirements. However, if students don't concomitantly acquire critical computer literacy, they will not be able to affect the conditions of their lives, for it is critical computer literacy that allows us to comprehend our relationship with computer technology and its uses, possibilities, and meanings. (290)

Duffelmeyer argues that composition teachers must teach not only basic computer skills but also be proponents of a critical view of the computer and its effects on society. In this view of the profession, computer literacy, like critical thinking skills, has become in a short time integral to the work of composition. My own graduate education and
experience as a teacher certainly mirror this development within English departments and the profession of rhetoric and composition.

During my first term as a graduate student, I enrolled in a course titled Computers in Composition. The class met in a networked computer lab twice per week. We studied hypertext, chat-functions, grammar and spell checkers. I wrote a term paper arguing that email communication between teachers and students may not be the panacea that some theorists and pedagogues were labeling it; the instant access to the instructor that this technology would seemingly provide, I speculated, would be tantamount to giving out a teacher's home phone number with instructions to call at any time, day or night, when problems or concerns arose. The Web was in its infancy then, so we focused our attention on such programs as Hypercard.

I remember enjoying this class immensely, but I do not remember leaving it with any real sense about how to teach a writing course in a computer-enhanced environment. This lack of confidence was essentially unimportant, though, for I never taught a composition class in a computerized classroom at that university. Five years went by, in fact, between that course and my first foray into the a networked classroom. In those five years, the Web exploded onto the scene, millions of Americans began using email as part of their work and home lives, and technical and business writing courses (which I will refer to by the name “professional” writing, a subset separate from first-year composition within writing programs) found a home in English departments.

I was unprepared for teaching in a computer-enhanced classroom, despite my early training. In my five years at The University of Arizona (UA), I have seen the
Department of English undergo a transformation that is taking place at many universities, large and small: Current and future teachers are able to take advantage of a great deal of training, coursework, and secondary support for their work in computer-enhanced composition (CEC). At UA there are, now, multiple courses in both the theory and pedagogy of CEC. Two graduate students receive course-releases so that they can serve as technical-support for the Department. Two separate computer labs are dedicated solely to writing courses (and the graduate-level courses mentioned earlier). All of this—the support, the hardware, and the courses—has developed in less than five years, and students receive a rich education in both writing and computer literacy because of these developments. Computers have only been a part of the writing classroom for a short time, but they have already become a large part of our profession, a lion in the road that can neither be ignored nor easily avoided. Older technologies, particularly the television, have not been embraced in a similar fashion.

Harmlessly Drunk: Attitudes Against Visual Texts in the Field of English

Recently, Christina Haas summarized the current technological situation of composition this way: “During the past two decades, the subfield of computers and writing has grown and developed a rich conception of technology through hands-on work with computers in classrooms and through active scholarship” (209-10). This observation certainly reflects my own experiences. Yet similar developments never took place in the field of rhetoric and composition regarding television, a technology that has been present in more than 90% of homes since the early 1960s (Spigel 1-7). Now, it is
estimated that more than 70% of homes contain two or more televisions, with at least one VCR, and as Robert W. McChesney reports, "the average American consumed a whopping 11.8 hours of media [particularly television] per day in 1998" (1). Despite the prevalence of television in American culture, the study of visual texts in English has focused most heavily on feature-length films—when it focuses on the visual text at all. A brief survey of articles from prominent journals serves to demonstrate this focus on film and, less commonly, television, for, as Robert Connors writes, "The journals of an academic discipline provide a clear reflection of that discipline's past, a synchronic portrait of its current state, and a glimpse of its dreams and plans for the future" (348).

In a 1971 article in *College Composition and Communication*, Richard Williamson argues that those academics "who believe a school should be a repository and dispensary of knowledge fail to recognize that knowledge is much more readily available from the television set than from the lectern" (131). Students, Williamson argues, receive a much more applicable education from electronic media than from outdated modes of education. Rather than focusing solely on the writing of essays, Williamson sees the composition class as a place where students should compose films, in addition to traditional essays. This would allow the "student to express himself in the way he is most often communicated to," while still pushing the concepts of "clear thought and effective expression" (134). Although he frequently refers to television, Williamson argues that the most common method of communication among the young is film; therefore the schools of English and filmmaking should combine. English classes should continue to teach academic discourse while also allowing students the chance to express themselves
in film. Williamson’s argument is lacking in concrete suggestions, though. Teachers of English must incorporate film into their classes—both the study of film and the creation of film—but Williamson is noticeably vague about how this should be accomplished.

Fifteen years after Williamson’s argument appeared in CCC, William Costanzo offered a more pragmatic approach to the same topic. Costanzo argues,

Films are compositions, too. So are news shows, situation comedies, and commercials. The more we learn about these primarily visual constructions—how they are created, shaped, and understood—the better equipped we will be to help our students move from the world of movie screens and television tubes to the universe of written discourse. Instead of using media from time to time as “visual aids,” or as mere diversions from the process of writing, we can use them more directly and more productively by treating film, television, and writing as analogous forms of composition. (79)

Unlike Williamson, Costanzo sees film as an object for study, useful for its comparative value to writing. He does not see a composition class as a site for student authoring of films. Underscoring the importance of such analysis in composition courses, Costanzo concludes by arguing that “Film and television continue to dominate a major portion of [our students’] formative years, creating expectations, shaping attitudes, influencing language patterns, and providing a common frame of reference. [. . .] The power of the visual image has never been greater” (86). This is an attitude and approach echoed by Winifred J. Wood in her 1998 article in College English, “Double Desire: Overlapping
Discourses in a Film Writing Course, where she explores students’ responses to various films and speculates about what these students are gaining—and losing—as they analyze the visual texts in their world. Articles such as these are rare, particularly because they attempt, in under-developed ways, to include television in their discussions of visual texts in composition classes. Most articles, such as Eve Wiederhold’s “Called to the Law: Tales of Pleasure and Obedience,” focus entirely on movies, in this case John Ford’s film Young Mr. Lincoln, and ignore television entirely.

Looking more closely at College English, particularly those issues published between 1960 and 1990, a clear pattern of prejudice against visual texts emerges. The April 1977 issue of College English was devoted entirely to considerations of “mass culture” in English studies; several of the articles in this issue dealt with the more common representatives of mass culture in the English classroom—the advertisement and the televisual drama/comedy, while most dealt with feature films. The fact that College English devoted an entire issue to visual texts is surprising, for only a handful of articles on such texts appeared in the two decades prior to publication of this issue.

In his 1976 article “Mass Communications and Teachers of English,” Patrick Brantlinger argues that “On the freshman level, communications courses promise an expansion of the old composition requirement [and] training in the rudiments of visual literacy to students who are daily bombarded by images from the mass media,” while courses in English ignore visual literacy to the detriment of their students (491-92). Brantlinger argues, ultimately, that both English and Communications are missing the point. English teachers analyze mass culture, and Communications teachers show
students how to create better commercials for television and be better announcers on radio. He concludes, "Unless such teaching starts from and returns to the questions of the social structure and values of the forms themselves, it will suggest that all we need are better comic books, better advertisements, and television shows that are a little more like War and Peace and a little less like Jonathan Livingston Seagull" (507).

In her article "Through the Narrator with Word and Camera," Carroll Britch writes, "[T]he fact is that the visual media have invaded the classroom, the traditional home of the word. The problem the invasion has created is not that students are now suddenly thinking in pictures but that they find themselves at a loss for words about what pictures say" (242). To deal with this problem, Britch argues that film and print must be treated not as separate forms; instead, we must study each communicative medium as a literary medium in its own right. Ultimately, Britch argues that students should be taught to find the "narrator" on both page and screen, to analyze critically the construction of a given work and their own reactions to it. At the least, such consideration will "contribute to lively classroom discussion" (252). Even as she champions the inclusion of visual literacy in first-year composition, Britch falls prey to the traditional, dismissive attitudes of professionals in English against such inclusion, minimizing the contributions and possibilities of her own arguments with this final comment on a lively classroom.

Arguing about the inclusion of film in English courses, particular early writing and literature courses, Richard M. Gollin writes that if "we bring film study into traditional courses in literature our colleagues regard us with genial condescension, as if we were harmlessly drunk." Film, he argues, is acceptable in the college curricula only
when "the film is not itself the subject of study but rather a visual aid to some larger, more worthy project" (424). To challenge this prejudice, Gollin argues that films "need to be studies as themselves, not as versions of something else" (425). While he does not directly mention writing courses, Gollin does argue that literature courses need to be more inclusive of visual texts; specifically, he argues that film belongs in such courses along with the study of drama, particularly modern drama, including the study of both the films themselves and the film scripts (426-27). In such an argument, Gollin blends traditional study of dramatic performance with study on finished films, comparing the study of the text of a play to the script for a film.

Analyzing televisual coverage of the Vietnam War in his 1977 article "Mass Communication and Tautology," Stewart Justman argues,

> With the help of the mass media, the Vietnam War showed the ability of a thing to predicate itself by preempting its own cause. By not concerning themselves with the cause of it all, by taking what was served up to them from day to day—and taking it largely from official briefings and releases—the news media gave the impression that the war happened to us on its own. We had no hand in starting it, and its "momentum" carried it.

(635)

While such analysis is not the main focus of his article, Justman connects this type of tautological thinking in the media to "lesser" student writing in statements such as this excerpt from, presumably, a student paper: "The lowering of the drinking age was an added factor in the rise of teenage drinking" (636). To deal with such illogical, inferior
work, which Justman clearly feels this is, he argues, “We can and should teach writing, and the model at once of continuation and astonishing break which writing provides sentence by sentence may be the best ideal model for social change. But while it is taught we should understand that students breathe bad air” (639). Two attitudes are at work here; Justman dismisses television as a critical form, as scholars in English have traditionally done, but he dismisses the students' major medium for interacting with their world.

In 1960, Walter Ong argued that “The teacher’s work involves him in a constant interior dialogue with the past, the present, and the future. Since the only source of knowledge is the experience we have had up to the present time, or in other words past experience, he has to communicate with the past, to raid it for what it has to tell him” (245). As he makes this argument about dialogue and history, Ong moves into a consideration of the media traditionally studied in academe. We are, he argues, “leaving the Gutenberg era behind us” for what are, at heart, oral forms of communication, including television (246). Extending his argument, Ong writes that “These new media [radio, television, tape recordings] are not just new gadgets to be employed for what we are already doing with other less efficient gadgets. They are part of a shift which is inexorably affecting our very notion of what communication itself is” (249). As this shift occurs, scholars must study these new forms, and they must teach their students to be aware of them as well. Ong's argument is an argument many scholars cited herein have echoed for decades, with little overall effect.
Harvey S. Wiener, arguing his ideas about visual literacy, clearly sees non-written work as a move backwards, a concession to students with little knowledge of or ability to work with the written word. He begins by stating that

It is no news to anyone teaching college English today that students sitting before us make up a non-literary generation where words and books intrude upon rather than mold a way of life extravagant in its neglect of the written form. [...] Of course, as instructors of English and composition, it is our charge to resuscitate the powers and glories of the written word, to bring the student in some way to see along with Emerson that words are a mode of divine energy and that words are actions and actions a kind of words (566).

Further assuring his audience that he is not a rebel arguing for the serious inclusion of visual texts in English courses, Wiener writes, "I do not mean watching network television in class" and "I do not mean allowing the dazzle of media to replace the tedious, discouraging process of learning to write." Instead, Wiener argues that non-written compositions should be allowed—such as the collage, photography, or cassette recordings—as preludes to written work, as prewriting activities (566). Wiener excludes film and video tape from his consideration because of the exorbitant prices such mediums would involve. In a surprising reversal, Wiener concludes his argument:

To hold an inveterate suspicion towards the non-written medium as if it debases the word as the golden means of communication is a narrowness of vision that will not serve well the interests of this special generation of
students. It is an uncomfortable contradiction, too, that many among us cannot warm to what for our students is the very life's blood (574).

Typifying attitudes in English towards television, students, and the entire medium of televisual communication, Wiener is trapped within a vicious loop wherein television is simultaneously suspect and worthy of study—particularly for academics now confronted by this “special” generation of students.

In his 1982 *College English* article “Television and the News,” Brantlinger writes that “Anyone writing about television today is apt to feel like a member of a nearly extinct species,” for attitudes in English towards visual communication have always been negative (475). Rather than finding a home in English departments, television was often forced to the margins of theory, pedagogy, and publication by a dismissive attitude and thoughtless, knee-jerk prejudice. Commenting on this situation, Vincent B. Leitch argues, “Despite rumors to the contrary, the attitude ‘anything goes’ does not exist. Certain topics, methods, and subjects simply appear beyond the pale. The disciplines are at once enabling and productive and restrictive and confining” (125). Within English, the critical study of visual texts is restricted by a tradition that privileges the written and, sometimes, spoken word. As a final example of this prejudice against the study of visual texts in writing classes, I turn to an article I coauthored years ago which, paradoxically, focuses on the use of segments from popular films such *A Few Good Men* and *Scent of a Woman* in first-year composition.

In 1995 Darin Payne and I, while teaching at Eastern Washington University, coauthored an article titled “Starting with What We Share: Indiana Jones, Language
Arts, and the Rosetta Stone.” The piece, published in the Washington English Journal, was an almost-first publication for both of us. I still use the basic assignments we describe—involving the use of film clips in the teaching of composition—and believe that the core ideas are sound, but usability and believability aside, the article is an embarrassment, specifically the introductory paragraph, not for what it says, but for the attitude that provides its foundation:

Our students go to movies on the weekend, and they rent video tapes almost daily. They have home libraries of films purchased or taped from television. They spend much of their conversation time discussing what they have recently watched. We shake our heads when we overhear such palaver within the walls of our classrooms. We sigh as they compare the merits of various actors, extol the virtues of one film and berate the shallowness of another—and never once mention the intriguing reading that was assigned for homework. These are our responses not because we dislike films, but because such discussions in our language arts classrooms seem sadly out of place and serve as a lamentable indication of the massive gulf between our students’ world and our own. (24)

I would like to argue that we are being clever here, speaking tongue-in-cheek. I am fairly certain we are not, though, and this confuses me. Neither Darin nor I fit the teacher-personae we create here, yet this stuffy, pretentious, us-versus-them creation appears in even the earliest drafts of our article. Why, then, did we feel it necessary to adopt this
tone from draft-one? The answer involves questions of authority and attitudes about the worth of visual texts in writing classes.

The dismissive, condescending attitude towards video in this passage was an appeal to our audience, teachers of secondary and post-secondary English. It was, for two graduate students new to the profession, an awkward attempt at audience identification, a way for us to say “We are like you; we value the things you value. But we also use video in our classes, and, although video is to be shunned, we must work with it in order to draw in the students.” We wanted our audience to take us seriously, even though we were writing about making video a central part of first-year composition courses. We were working against the forces of both tradition and prejudice, a binary identified by Kathleen Welch during a visit to The University of Arizona in the late 1990s.

Speaking about her own days as a new member of the profession of rhetoric and composition, Welch mentioned that she owned a television, which she kept on a mobile stand. She kept it on this stand so that the device could easily be hidden when colleagues visited, hidden so that no one in English would know that she actively watched TV. In *Electric Rhetoric*, Welch makes this argument explicit,

> Video rules [in America] because its monitors have been emitting signals in mostly private locations, on a mass scale, since the late 1940s. The humanities disciplines, so definitively enamored of the printed word (more than of the spoken word or of the language of graphics), have not taken account of this ubiquitous symbol system. (5)
In this text, though, Welch does not dwell exclusively on television. Instead, she focuses on the rhetoric of screens, especially computers.

While study of computers in academe and the larger society is certainly important, study of television seems to be coming late to English departments, although it has long been a focus within departments of Communications and Media Studies. In the remainder of this chapter I analyze four first-year composition texts that attempt to incorporate study of TV into composition in a meaningful way—as a central component of writing courses, in fact. From first-year composition, I move to describing several texts that could be used to teach a course on the rhetoric of the television news media at the graduate level, specifically for students in the field of rhetoric and composition; I conclude with recommendations about possibilities for future research.

Visual Texts in Composition: Four Textbooks

In this section I analyze four composition textbooks that focus exclusively on visual texts: Television: The Critical View, an anthology edited by Horace Newcomb; Seeing & Writing, by Donald and Christine McQuade; Anne Cassebaum and Rosemary Haskell’s American Culture and the Media: Reading, Writing, and Thinking; and Rhetoric Through Media, by Gary Thompson. These textbooks were chosen for two reasons: (1) They are all among the newest of their type, the oldest having been printed in 1994, the newest in 2000, and (2) each of these texts was, upon initial release, heavily-promoted by its publisher at national conferences in rhetoric and composition, and all are still readily available. A third reason also exists—and may be the most important of all,
although it only emerged in retrospect: These four texts take both their subject and the
students themselves seriously. Too many textbooks that deal with visual literacy fall into
the category Brantlinger describes in his 1976 article, where he writes that “Many of the
attempts to deal with the mass media and their offerings in English classes have been
fiascoes,” flooding the humanities with “silly” anthologies by English teachers “dealing
with mass culture [...] in ways that are both undiscriminating and patronizing to
students” (501). Below, I summarize each text’s content and approach to teaching
writing, its incorporation of visual texts, and the types of writing it asks students to
perform. Because the systematic inclusion of visual texts into the writing classroom is a
radical shift away from traditional notions of appropriate writing pedagogy, I have
evaluated each of these books according to its usefulness to a teacher who has little or no
familiarity with teaching courses built around the study of visual texts.

*Television: The Critical View* first appeared in 1975; since then, it has gone
through five editions. The latest edition is organized around three basic areas: the
“production contexts” of television programs; analyses of specific kinds of programs; and
overviews of the medium, its history, and its place in American culture. Thirty-four
essays appear in this anthology, analyzing topics from *Roseanne* and blue-collar
comedies to the ideology of prime time programming to fans of *Star Trek*. Newcomb
provides introductory remarks to contextualize each of the three sections, but little else.
There are no suggested activities, no questions for discussion, no writing assignments.

Newcomb’s textbook is a straightforward anthology of criticism, of essays that
analyze different aspects of the televisual medium. Its 634 pages do not contain a single
visual image. The book fits within the tradition of English textbooks in this way, by effacing visuals at the same time it presents them as legitimate objects for analysis. Newcomb is overtly working against the prejudice I described earlier; this is clear from his introductory essay to the collection:

[Television was rarely considered a prominent, significant, or special contributor to culture and society. It was seen as neither conduit for nor commentator on the aesthetic, political, or moral lives of citizens—except in the most negative manner. When television was “seriously” thought of by anyone who would take education seriously in its large sense, it was most often figured as intruder, as complicator, as rogue or pollutor. (3)]

Like Payne and I did in our 1996 article, Newcomb attempts to validate the study of television for an audience that, he assumes, is actively against this idea.

For teachers with little or no experience in the use of televisual texts in the classroom, using Television: The Critical View as a central component of a writing class would be nearly impossible. Aside from grouping the essays into the three main areas identified above, the book provides no structure for a beginning teacher to follow. Additionally, a teacher new to this area receives no guidance regarding either classroom activities or writing assignments. The text is, in the end, a collection of essays by theorists all-but-unknown in English departments, and no frame of reference is provided by which a teacher can guide his or her choices during course design or execution. For teachers knowledgeable in media studies and experienced in teaching courses focused on
television or film, Newcomb's anthology would serve admirably. As an introductory text, *Television: The Critical View* fails both teachers and students.

*Seeing & Writing* fails as a composition textbook for similar reasons. The essays in this textbook are by theorists outside of rhetoric and composition, making the book appear foreign at first glance. This feeling of Otherness is compounded by the texts greatest strength: It contains many visuals, particularly photographs, but also comic strips, reproductions of paintings, and magazine advertisements. These texts are paired with essays, poems, and fiction, under categories such as "Observing the Ordinary," "Capturing Memorable Moments," "Constructing Race," and "Engendering Difference." Each of these major sections is subdivided into introductory material, readings, and texts for further analysis.

Unlike *Television: The Critical View*, *Seeing & Writing* is a self-contained textbook and anthology. All of the texts necessary for analysis in a course focused on visual rhetoric are present—from abstract paintings to photographs of the struggle for civil rights for African-Americans during the 1960s. Each text, visual or textual, is followed by questions in two areas: "Seeing" and "Writing." The "Seeing" questions focus on the visual aspects of the photographs, poems, etc., while the "Writing" questions lead students to perform the types of rhetorical analysis often demanded in first-year composition. Some selections are also followed by a category of assignments titled "Re: Searching the Web." For example, after a selection of photographs taken moments before the assassination of John F. Kennedy, taken by Dave Powers, a "Seeing" questions asks students to
Compare Powers's photograph with the Zapruder film frame [also shown in the text]. Comment on the positioning of the car within the frame of each photograph. How do the different camera angles produce two different "takes" on the assassination? How do they affect what you already knew about the event? (143)

Such a set of questions drives the students to consider, in detail, the rhetoric of the photographs being discussed, the effects each image has upon an audience, and the technical aspects of the pictures themselves. Under "Writing" students are asked to follow this consideration from "Seeing" with a deep exploration of their own lives, their own responses to the mediated world around them:

What would you call the defining moment of your generation so far?

Write an essay in which you first explore in detail the circumstances of your personal experiences with that event and then explain its impact on your generation. You might explore some of the following questions:

What makes an event significant to an entire nation? What constitutes a generation to you as an individual? What role did technology play in your event? To what extent are your notions of significant events mediated by the filters of print and visual media? (143)

Taken together, the photographs, questions, and writing suggestions could be of immediate use to teachers, even those with little experience in either cultural studies or media studies. Students, and teachers, are led through the process of analysis; they are
shown texts and taught to analyze them through the presentation of the "Seeing" and "Writing" material.

While the section on the Kennedy assassination is not followed by a Web-based assignment, a later collection, centered around the famous photograph of Kim Phuc, a Vietnamese child, fleeing in tears from a napalm strike. Again the questions and writing suggestions focus on issues of memory and the visual medium. Under "Re: Searching the Web," students are told, after some historical remarks about the photograph and opposition to the Vietnam War, that

Some members of the American press criticized Phuc for participating in what they viewed as an antimilitary publicity tour [in 1998 when she toured the US promoting peace and reconciliation]. Using the resources of a search engine on the web, conduct research on the origins, purpose(s), and impact of Kim Phuc's visit to the United States. (You might use the web to connect to the newspaper accounts in the cities she visited.) Write an essay in which you provide an overview of her visit and then argue for—or against—the assertion that her trip was an antimilitary tour. (164)

Like the "Seeing" and "Writing" sections, this question concerning the Web is prescriptive: It tells students what to do, how to do it, and what to argue. An experienced instructor could readily work with such material, modifying it for his or her purposes; an inexperienced teacher could rely on such material until he or she developed more comfort with such analyses.
Like *Television: The Critical View*, *Seeing & Writing* could intimidate teachers and students new to the analysis of visual texts; unlike Newcomb's book, the McQuades provide the tools necessary for developing a course centered on such texts. Because *Seeing & Writing* also contains essays, fiction, and poetry, it could easily be integrated into a traditional writing or literature course. Rather than abandoning the genres that normally dominate such courses, this text folds them into a thematically-organized text.

In *American Culture and the Media: Reading, Writing, and Thinking*, Anne Cassebaum and Rosemary Haskell take a similar approach to that of the McQuades. Section one of the book is titled "Reading and Writing about American Culture and the Media," and it is subdivided into sections such as "Work," "Diversity," "Gender Roles," "Sports," and "Violence." Each of these sections contains six or more short essays, with questions before and after each reading. In the section on images of the working-world, for example, there is an essay by Jon Katz about the Fox television program *Cops*. Before they read the essay, students are asked to think about the police programs they are familiar with from TV and to give their opinion of these programs; they are also asked to speculate on the difficulties on "covering the cops" for television and newspaper reporters (65). After reading Katz's essay, students are asked, first, to give their reactions to the piece and, second, to examine several other essays in *American Culture and the Media* for comparative purposes. The final section, which follows each reading, is titled "Learning about Writing from Reading." In this case, students are told, "Katz's article contains some nice examples of sentences composed of long lists of distinct but parallel elements. Not, in the following sample, how three such lists are combined in a single
long sentence” (72). Combined with the pre- and post-reading questions, this section drives students to consider their own experiences, their own knowledge about television, their reactions to the reading, and the textual aspects of the work itself—an examination that begins with thoughts on American culture as a whole and ends with a study of the structure of specific sentences.

With the structure outlined above, this book, like Seeing & Writing is a self-contained reader for a composition course, although the focus here is limited to non-fiction criticism to the exclusion of other genres, such as fiction and poetry. Occasional visuals, such as an image from an episode of Cops, appear in context. Television is the central focus of this book, but it maintains this focus in a manner consistent with the genre of the composition textbook. This format, with its critical essays framed by appropriate questions, makes the book accessible for teachers who are familiar with television but not, perhaps, with the criticism of television. The strength of this book as an introductory text rests in its second half.

In section two, titled “Working on Your Paper: A Guide to Writing,” students move through suggestions from “Coming Up with Ideas” to “Working the Library” to “Getting and Giving Good Criticism.” Aside from being a reader, American Culture and the Media is also a writing textbook in the most explicit sense. Students are guided through the processes of writing, researching, editing, and responding to the writing of others. The final two sections of the book even focus on topics such as “Five Ways to Avoid Panic: Writing Well on the Spot” and “Reading and Reacting to Grades and Comments.” Cassebaum and Haskell provide a reader and prescriptive text capable of
serving as the center of a composition course with little or no outside support from other texts. Unlike *Television: The Critical View*, it incorporates visuals smoothly into the critical essays; like *Seeing & Writing*, it guides teachers and students through the process of analyzing and writing about visual texts regardless of their prior writing experiences, or lack thereof, in this area.

Gary Thompson's *Rhetoric Through Media* attempts to be a reader on a very limited scale—containing some student essays and occasional visual texts—but primarily focuses on its work as a textbook, as a prescriptive set of instructions on how to analyze and then write about visual texts. Section one, “Exploring Concepts,” defines such key terms as *rhetoric, media, medium, text, myth*, etc. Students are encouraged to begin keeping a “media log,” an ongoing list of what they watched on TV or video tape or listened to on the radio, the time spent doing each activity, the content of each program or session, and their reactions to each.

In section two, titled “Media and Purposes for Writing,” students are given a brief overview of the writing process, information about gathering and evaluating information, and several processes for analyzing commercials and photographs. As they move through each of the five chapters in this section, students are given points to ponder and assignments to fulfill. In an early “Pause for Reflection,” in the chapter examining the television news media, students are told,

> Look back over your media log to get a sense of what proportion of the time you spend with media involves news and information. What issues have you paid attention to during this time? Why those? Write briefly
about what you want from news media. How well do the texts you use for information serve those purposes? Also write about ways in which you characteristically think about news media. What stories have helped shape the way you think about the news and about the organizations that provide news and information? What are some of the narratives by which other people think about the news? (143)

An assignment such as this is interesting, and an experienced teacher could undoubtedly make use of it, but it seems both vague and too broad for less-experienced teachers and students to handle. Students are asked to perform several separate tasks, from reflecting on their own ideas to, apparently, seeking out the thoughts of other students, all within the context of a "Pause for Reflection." With little introductory information, students are asked to consider matters that would be difficult even after lengthy deliberation.

The third and final section of *Rhetoric Through Media*, titled "Reconsiderations," moves students through analysis of "deeper" purposes in visual texts, revision of their own writing, "Developing Style and Audience Awareness," and expanding their research to other media. A lengthy discussion of style is present, as is a dated, but still useful, consideration of the use of Internet sources of information. In the latter section, this typical "Assignment" appears:

If you have access to World Wide Web, use a search procedure to look up documents on the cyberporn controversy. Keep track of your search paths and compare sources with others. Does your college involve itself in any sort of censorship of, or restriction of access to, electronic media? If so,
who is responsible for making such decisions, on what grounds, and with what procedures? How does this issue of restricted access compare to the treatment of printed materials in the bookstore or college library? To what students living on campus may buy or subscribe to privately? To what is legally accessible for those living off campus? (626)

This assignment, like that quoted earlier, is extremely large and may be difficult for inexperienced teachers and students to handle. Its movement from the Web to the students’ own college is worth noting, for it points to the difficulties using Thompson’s text involves.

*Rhetoric Through Media* is not an anthology, and it is only secondarily a composition textbook: It is, first and foremost, a rhetoric. This focus is clear in statements such as that at the end of the chapter on electronic media:

Electronic media are not windows on the world any more than is television or film; their statements have to be considered and applied by readers, just as are those of news media or entertainment texts, or the statements of political figures and others in positions of authority. You should develop the habit of looking carefully at those you rely on for guidance. (642)

Thompson text attempts to reframe visual mediums—particularly television and photography—for students, exposing the argumentative underpinnings often left hidden by surface-level analyses. As the writing assignment quoted earlier makes clear, Thompson also wants the students to connect their study of rhetoric and visual media back to both their own lives (as evidenced by the media log developed in chapter one)
and the turn to the community in their writing. This broad focus makes *Rhetoric Through Media* the most unwieldy text for new teachers to develop a course around.

Each of the four texts analyzed above attempts to incorporate the study of visual texts into the composition classroom in a central, meaningful way. Some succeed more than others. *Television: The Critical View* is a rich anthology, but its lack of visuals and pedagogical support hamper its usability by new teachers. *Seeing & Writing* is a visually-rich text, further strengthened by its inclusion of fiction, poetry, and other non-visual genres. *Rhetoric Through Media* is ambitious, attempting to teach rhetoric, writing, and analysis of multiple-media (aural, visual, electronic). Its ambition may be its downfall, as the book is too scattered for an inexperienced teacher to manage and to lacking in terms of visual support for its selected essays and assignments. *American Culture and the Media* is the most successful of these four books; its focus is narrow, focused almost entirely on television, and its organization is familiar to teachers of composition: pre- and post-reading questions frame each reading, and half of the book is dedicated explicitly to the teaching of composition. As the central text in a first-year composition course, a text such as this would serve both teachers and students well.

If the textbooks can be taken as an indication of what is taking place in the classroom, then the study of visual rhetoric at the undergraduate level is well underway. As we develop this approach, however, we must not fall into the us-versus-them thinking that characterizes so many discussions of film and television in English classes. Payne and I reinforced this elitist notion in the introduction to our article discussed earlier; Thomas J. Slater makes similar assumptions when he argues that studying films such as
Letter to Jane (1972) is difficult "the average undergraduate [...] is not used to films that ask him or her to think" (270). Payne and I worked under the mistaken assumption that students think critically only about the films they watch; Slater's assumption is that they do not like to think about film at all. Both assumptions go too far. Students already understand the televisual text, but they generally lack the critical vocabulary to analyze such texts. By incorporating the study of images and film into our writing courses—and using a book well-suited to the task—we can tap into this knowledge students already possess and increase the critical faculties required for academic writing at the post-secondary level.

Graduate Education in English and Visual Rhetoric

I began this chapter writing about the inroads computers have made into the field of English studies; these incursions have been further strengthened by the demands for students trained in professional writing. Classes concerned with the pedagogy of professional writing and the demands of CEC are, at present, the places most likely to contain discussions of visual rhetoric. Courses focused explicitly on the study of visual media still seem to be marginalized in English departments, although they play a central role in fields such as media studies, communications, and political science. In the remainder of this section I outline a course at the graduate level that would focus exclusively on visual rhetoric, including the books that could be used and the rationale for including each.
Before a course in visual rhetoric could be implemented, its purpose would need to be established; this would, in part, involve establishing clear statements about what the course is not. A graduate course in visual rhetoric should not be a course in rhetorical analysis; it must move beyond consideration of individual texts to a more holistic, historically-minded approach to the topic. Analysis of texts would take place, of course, but such analysis cannot be seen as the center of the students' work.

A course in this area, for students in rhetoric and composition, would need to weave three scholarly threads together: study of the rhetoric of historical representation, of the television news media, and of narrative theory. Much of the scholarship would be new to the students, so the course would need to be self-contained, providing both the theoretical foundation students need and the examples of the explication of those theories upon actual texts. Working under these limitations, I selected the texts described below for a course that would allow students to tap into the depths of theory while seeing those theories worked out in extended monographs focused on the Gulf War. Ultimately, this course is divided into three basic units. In the first, students study the interplay between reality and rhetorical representations of that reality. Unit two focuses on the study of media and forms of communication. The final unit focuses on study of the Gulf War, providing explication of the theories being discussed and an easily-accessible extension of those theories into the study of the news media's involvement in representations of both the present and the past.

The first text students should read is Plato's "Myth of the Cave," paired with Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, a seminal work in media studies. This would
establish at the outset the idea that this is a course in the rhetoric of the news media and not just a course on the how-to of analysis. Although he is writing about the newspaper's failings as a news medium, Lippmann's arguments about the pseudo-reality that is created by newspapers is echoed in modern arguments about television; because he is analyzing newspapers, too, his subject may be more immediately accessible to students in English, long-accustomed to the analysis of the written word.

From this beginning in Plato and Lippmann, graduate students should move in the second unit of the course to Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* and Hayden White's *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Paired, these two monographs would move the students to think further about the importance of the medium through which information is transmitted; McLuhan moves beyond Lippmann's focus on the newspaper to a consideration of both radio and television, while White draws students into a discussion not of medium but of form. His focus on narration and historical representation are particularly important when later texts, focused specifically on coverage of the Gulf War, are examined.

Once students have established a firm grounding in the area of media studies, they should be introduced to a work that focuses solely on the television news media: W. Lance Bennett's *News: The Politics of Illusion*. Bennett develops themes first raised by Lippmann and McLuhan in a running-analysis of the ways in which the television news media construct political reality in the United States. A good companion for Bennett's text, particularly for students with little background in the detailed study of the interplay
between television and politics, would be Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising*. Hall analyzes the images crafted by each presidential candidate from 1952 to 1992, focusing specifically on the advertisements each campaign designed to further its message. Even though advertising is the focus, rather than the news media, the book is a rich historical resource that could be used to demonstrate the ways in which media studies are played out in a different set of analyses.

The final unit of this course on the rhetoric of the news media would revolve around study of three texts. In his short monograph *Hotel Warriors*, John J. Fialka provides an overview of the coverage of the Gulf War. His work is particularly important because it explicates the differences in attitude towards the news media held by the US Army and Marines. Specifically, he argues that the Army received little positive coverage during the war because of its inability to incorporate the manipulation of journalists into its standard methods of operation, while the Marines received the lion’s share of good coverage because, as one Marine put it, “‘[The Marines] regarded [journalists] as an environmental feature of the battlefield, kind of like the rain. If it rains you operate wet’” (27). With this grounding in the history of relations between the news media and the military during the Gulf War, students should move to Baudrillard’s *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* and *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, by Jerry Lembcke. Both of these works establish the Gulf War as a televisual event wherein coverage was indebted more to the medium of television than to the reality it purported to cover. For Baudrillard, this is the natural extension of the medium of
television itself, echoing arguments made by McLuhan and Lippmann. For Lembcke, such coverage is an outgrowth of American ambivalence about the past, specifically about the Vietnam War.

Taken as a whole, the course designed around these texts would give students in rhetoric and composition a foundation in media studies that begins with Plato's cave and ends with Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Teachers would be able to immediately apply the analytical tools they learn here to their own classrooms; scholars would be able either to develop arguments about television and reality or to branch out into the study of advertising, technology, or historical representation. Whatever approach we take to the study of visual rhetoric—and whatever books we use—we must not make the kind of mistake Beason describes at the beginning of this chapter, and we must not allow our entrenched prejudices against visual texts turn our study of them into knee-jerk cynicism. The study of television must be approached cautiously, as we have learned to approach the use of computers in English studies. The study of television must be incorporated into the ongoing work of rhetoric and composition, rather than simply being purchased wholesale from other disciplines; we must incorporate the work done in other fields and remake that work in our own. Finally, the study of television must be done more critically in departments of English at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, for television is the text that weaves itself throughout our lives and not just the lives of our students.
A Call for Future Research

I began this chapter with a brief discussion of the field of rhetoric and composition, of the critical attention paid to computers and the inattention to television. To conclude, I turn to my recommendations for further research in three related areas: history, media studies, and technology studies.

Numerous histories of the field of rhetoric and composition have appeared in the last five years. All of these histories—from John C. Brereton’s collection *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* to W. Ross Winterowd’s *The English Department: A Personal and Institutional History* to Thomas P. Miller’s *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces*—focus their attention on the artifacts of the field (such as textbooks and student essays) and the ideological forces at work on this discipline at a given point in time. None of these histories devote even a part of their attention to representations of the field of English in popular culture.

As the Vietnam War is imaged and reimaged on film and television, so is the English teacher. In “Indecent Proposals: Teachers in the Movies,” Dale M. Bauer analyzes the images of teachers in several films, beginning with *The Mirror Has Two Faces*, arguing that “Teaching’s public image must be more carefully pursued and promoted: our pedagogical image must be a powerful, deliberate, and even seductive model of social transformation” (316). Analyses such as this—analyses of teachers as they are imaged in popular culture—must be done both more frequently and with more critical depth. Robin Williams’s role in *Dead Poet’s Society*, for example, is fine...
propaganda, reinforcing Romantic notions of creativity and desire through its philosophy of *carpe diem*. Williams's character is placed in opposition to the stodgy Latin teacher and the headmaster of the school, himself a former English teacher, both representations of the stuffy, intellectually stagnant atmosphere of the private preparatory school the lead characters in the film attend. Against this unpleasant background, Williams's character reimages the English teacher as a vibrant intellectual more concerned with his love for teaching than with the oppressive rules of the world around him. The same reimagining of the English teacher takes place in the movie *Pump Up the Volume*, starring Christian Slater. In this film, Slater plays a student in Arizona who runs a pirate radio station that is reviled by the administrators at his high school. While the principal and vice-principal attempt to have his radio station silenced, Slater's English teacher supports him and encourages his creativity.

Other representations of English teachers in American culture—outside of film—are less positive, particularly those constructed on television. As an example of this negative imaging at work, I turn to local news coverage in Tucson of the debate of high school graduation requirements. In Arizona, students are currently required to pass an English exam to graduate from high school. This English exam—involving both writing and multiple-choice questions—is the survivor of a larger test known as AIMS—Arizona's Instrument for Measuring Standards. Originally AIMS was to be a test of both math and English skills; the first time students took the math test, ninety percent failed. Results improved only marginally the next year. Math teachers argued that the test was unfair, that it tested material students were not learning in the required curriculum; their
arguments were persuasive, and the State Legislature dropped the math requirement.

English teachers never spoke up during the multi-year debate over AIMS, even though seventy percent of students failed the English portion of the test during both pilot years. Math teachers emerged from this assessment-nightmare imaged as caring, knowledgeable professionals who are committed to fair treatment of their students by the State. English teachers appeared as dictatorial grammar Nazis willing to fail more than 2/3 of their students. Local news coverage of the AIMS debate ominously warned students to use a dictionary and to watch their handwriting, for two English teachers would be reading their AIMS exam.

Two possible lines of inquiry are suggested in these brief examples. The first line of inquiry focuses on visuals: How are English teachers represented on film and television, and what are the consequences of these representations? What are the representations of the English teacher—as language cop, Romantic, lecherous predator, etc.—as opposed to teachers in other professions? Although interesting in its own right, research into topics such as these could also suggest where certain attitudes in American culture towards teachers of English derive.

A second area for future research suggested above combines both media studies and work on large-scale assessment. Every test assumes a certain pedagogy, and every pedagogy assumes a certain type of teacher. As the mania for more and more assessment at every level increases, the effects of these new assessments will flood the classroom. In Arizona, now, English teachers must adopt a pedagogy that focuses on editing of standard American English and writing short responses to disembodied prompts. But
while the test drives the pedagogy—and the teacher—into certain tracks, the television news media also play a part. More research must be done on the ways in which the news media construct teachers as they discuss assessment, and such research could lead to research into matters of public relations: How, for example, can teachers of English use the media to control the images of teachers, students, and tests that appear during the debates over assessment.

Research into the effects of technology on the English classroom have already begun, particularly concerning the computer. This work has, seemingly, subsumed earlier work done on visual rhetoric—specifically the work done on subjects such as page layout and design. In his 1983 article in *Rhetoric Review*, for example, Robert Connors analyzed the effects various typefaces and paper types upon readability of scholarly manuscripts; concerning margins, he argued against right-margin justification, "an option that has been given to most writers only recently, with the appearance of word-processing and computerized 'memory' typewriters" (64-68, 69). Though dated, this work still occurs in rhetoric and composition; the focus has, of course, shifted entirely away from typewritten and handwritten manuscripts to matters of font size, color schemes, and the layout of graphical elements. In a 1998 article on "visual" rhetoric, for example, Elizabeth Tebeaux encourages teachers to focus on the importance of teaching students to "write visually," using headings and subheadings to make text more accessible, writing with clarity and brevity, etc. Her conclusion, though focused on the importance of the visual elements of written texts, could easily apply to arguments made about the use of computers in composition and my own arguments about the place television should play
in our curriculum: "As teachers of writing we know that we can and often do make a
difference in our students' lives. But keeping our instruction relevant to their changing
needs will help ensure that we continue to make that important difference" (234).

As this text-based work is carried on by scholars of technical writing, other
contems must be addressed, particularly concerning the World Wide Web. As teachers
in this field focus on textual matters while teaching students Web site design, they also
need to be aware of the constructions of authority and credibility in the virtual world.
Indeed, more attention must be focused on the view of reality that is constructed on Web
sites. This attention must be paid not only to extremists such as Holocaust deniers but
also to more mainstream ideologues. How are the National Rifle Association and the
Southern Poverty Law Center constructing the world outside of their Web sites? Who are
they each hoping to reach, and to whom are they actually speaking? Teachers and
scholars in rhetoric and composition must address such questions and not simply perform
usability studies and readability reports on these sites.

In the end, this dissertation focuses on representations of the past on television,
particularly those representations championed by the news media. This work, in both its
narrow and broad sense, must continue. This work can, perhaps, be best summarized by
three questions that need to be asked: (1) Who is representing reality? (2) Under what
conditions are these representations produced and for whom? (3) What are the
consequences of these representations? In this work I have argued that the Vietnam War
is being represented for Americans by the television news media in a way that leaves the
audience’s view of the past fragmented, overly dramatized, and personalized; such
representations leave Americans with a skewed view of the past that limits their understanding of present conditions in the world—and thus limits their ability to deliberate about the meaning of the past and the proper actions for the future. While historians have long argued that every war is understood through the war that preceded it, this is no longer true for the American news media. Every new war is now understood through the Vietnam War; thus understanding of the present is crippled by its dependence on understanding of the past.
## APPENDIX A:
TRANScripT OF AT&T’s COMMERCIAL “IT’S ALL WITHIN YOUR REACH” AS AIRED ON THE LEARNING CHANNEL ON OCTOBER 11, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05-06 seconds</td>
<td>Interior: African-American man, early twenties, sitting on bench on right side of boat. Many men, women, and children in background, sitting on benches on both sides of boat, all Asian.</td>
<td>Guitar music continues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07-08 seconds</td>
<td>Interior: Closeup on female Asian child dressed in white shirt, face partially obscured by arm of man to her left.</td>
<td>Guitar music continues. Lyrics begin (see bottom).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09-11 seconds</td>
<td>Interior: Closeup on Asian man in his late forties or early fifties wearing a dark blue shirt open for several buttons down his chest. Left side of face illuminated by sunlight, right shadowed. He stares ahead, face unreadable. A middle-aged Asian woman behind him gazes out the window. A girl in her early teens stares across the aisle towards the young African American (who is not currently visible).</td>
<td>Guitar music and lyrics continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-16 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior: Closeup on African American male lying on his back, his white shirt completely unbuttoned, with hands linked beneath his head. Dog tags rest on his bare chest. In the near background is the river, sliding briskly past. Behind the river is a dense jungle treeline. The sky is now overcast, the sun hidden. The young man rolls his head to the side, looking at the jungle,</td>
<td>Music continues. Voiceover: “Dad was here.”</td>
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</table>
then looks straight ahead again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Voiceover:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-19 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior: The African-American man now sits at the prow of the boat facing inwards, his back to the river. His white shirt is still unbuttoned, but he now wears a white t-shirt and khaki pants. Jungle frames him on both sides. The sky above him is now cloudless and blue.</td>
<td>Music continues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior: Extreme closeup on African American’s face on left side of screen. Only bright sky visible on right side of screen. The sun shines on his face, casting the image into soft focus.</td>
<td>Music continues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-29 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior: River shore. A boat is pulled onto the bank; an Asian man on board tosses a bundle of cloth to a second man who stands on the shore. Scene shifts to a village street. Animal pens line left side, and a tree is on the right. An Asian child, maybe seven, runs ahead of the camera, looking back over his shoulder. He is barefoot and wears only a dark pair of shorts. Camera angle changes. Now we see the same street, but the young African American man strides up it, looking from side to side. Scene switches again. Now we see several young children, no more</td>
<td>Voiceover: “He never talked about it much. Said you had to be there.”</td>
<td>Music continues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than five years old, grasping the bars of a wooden fence or pen. All are smiling and dressed in bright colored clothes. Camera angle changes again. Now we see the African American man from the front, striding down the street. An old bus in the foreground obscures the left side on the screen. In the middleground, on each side of the man, dark shadows, possible of signs along the road, cross the screen.

| 30-36 seconds | Exterior: The African American man holds a map as an old Asian man beside him glances at it and then points offscreen to the right. The old man is nearly bald, with a scruffy goatee. He carries a cane in his right hand, and points with his left. He appears to be in his 70s or even 80s. A wooden fence is to the right and rolling, jungle-covered hills dominate the background. Scene switches to a hilltop. The camera pans left to right, slowly, focused on the young African American's back. He sits with his elbows resting on his thighs, his hands clasped before him, just below his chin. Raw earth, probably the top of a hill, is seen just behind him. Hills covered with jungle dominate the background, partially obscured by dust. There appear to be several rice paddies below him and to his left. |

<p>| 37-38 seconds | Interior: The young African American stands in the center of the background, behind two open batwing doors. He is bathed in sunlight from an offscreen window. The foreground and sides are very shadowed. Several people seem to be sitting in the area, eating, and a woman who appears to be a waitress is bustling through. Extreme closeup on |
| “Hey old man, how ya doing?” Music continues. Lyrics suspended. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Lyrics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39-40</td>
<td>Interior: We see an African American man in his 50s or early 60s holding a telephone in his right hand, cradles against his shoulder. He has short gray hair and a mostly gray beard. His shirt is black and brown checkers, faded, with white buttons. The sleeves are rolled up to his elbows. He is partially obscured by a wooden doorframe on the right. Also on the right we see three framed pictures hanging on a white wall. The scene is dark and shadowed.</td>
<td>“Ty? You still in Singapore?” Music continues. Lyrics suspended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-44</td>
<td>Interior: Closeup on young man’s face and torso, obscured on the right by the pay phone. The scene is brightly lit.</td>
<td>“No. I’m on leave. I’m in Vietnam.” Music continues. Lyrics suspended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-52</td>
<td>Interior: Closeup on older man’s face and the hand holding the telephone. The scene is dark, with light coming only from above. It shines on the man’s forehead and cheeks, leaving his eyes in deep shadow. As he speaks, he raises his head, bringing his whole face into the light. He purses his lips after speaking and looks offscreen to the upper left.</td>
<td>“Vietnam?” “Yeah.” Music continues. Lyrics suspended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>53-59</td>
<td>Interior: Closeup on the young man’s face and hand. He is brightly lit, hidden on the right by the payphone. He speaks in a voice choked with emotion, nodding his head slightly.</td>
<td>“You want to talk about it?” “Yeah, I do. I sure do.” Music continues. Lyrics suspended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>Black screen. AT&amp;T logo centered. Beneath logo: “It’s all within your reach.”</td>
<td>Music continues. Lyrics resume.</td>
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</table>
The lyrics are a slow, soft chant in a calm, dreamy voice echoed by a chorus: "It's been a long time coming. Going to be a long time gone. It's been a long time coming. And it appears to be a long..." The line plays only a single time, drawn out through the entire commercial. The final line is sung as the AT&T logo appears on the screen.
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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<tr>
<td>0-20 seconds</td>
<td>Dressed in a dark coat and light shirt, a middle-aged, red-haired, Caucasian anchor-woman speaks to the audience. Video monitors are active behind her, although the pictures they show are unclear. For the last 3 seconds of her monologue, her image is replaced by a graphic with the title “Comparisons” written across the left center of the screen in gold letters. Directly behind the title, an American flag, hung upside-down, is shown burning. The flames extend all across the bottom of the screen, from just left of center to the bottom right corner. Two photographs are set, one slightly atop the other, on the right side of the screen. The bottom photo shows six soldiers marching through short brown grass. The top picture shows one, possibly two, soldiers mostly obscured by dense jungle growth. Only the right arm of one soldier is clearly visible, raised above his head and holding a bayonet. The KGUN-9 logo rests in the lower-right corner.</td>
<td>Colleen Bagnall: “Some military veterans look at Yugoslavia and see their past. They say the fighting there reminds them of a war they fought and lost: Vietnam. Tammy Vigil talks to one veteran who draws some haunting comparisons between Yugoslavia and Vietnam.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-27 seconds</td>
<td>A still photograph, grainy and speckled with age, is shown: Two young men, most likely both teenagers, stand centered in the foreground. Mountains, possibly covered by jungle, dominate the background, leaving only a small strip of sky visible at the top. Both young men are dressed in green jungle fatigues and wear helmets. Each holds the edge of a map at which they are looking. The picture darkens, except for a bright circle around the head of the soldier standing on the right of the screen: Denny Evans.</td>
<td>Voice-over: “Denny Evans was just 19 when he served as a combat medic in Vietnam.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-34 seconds</td>
<td>Denny Evans, now middle-aged, sits center screen. The camera looks up at him. He is dressed in white shoes with velcro straps, blue jeans, and a black t-shirt. He wears</td>
<td>Vo: “31 years later he thumbs through memories that still torment him today—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-21s</td>
<td>glasses and has a thick mustache. As we watch, he thumbs through a stack of old photographs, examining each in turn. After a few seconds the view shifts, and the photographs dominate the screen. The camera focuses on one after another: The first shows a helicopter either landing or taking off from a brown, rocky field. The second shows a group of soldiers in green fatigues gathered together, sitting cross-legged on the ground. The third shows a smaller group of soldiers, three or four, sitting with a board in front of them, possibly playing a game of dice. The final picture shows a young soldier in green pants wearing no shirt. The camera has captured him as he walks toward it. He holds a circular hoop in his hands. Sandbagged bunkers are visible behind him.</td>
<td>memories that he says mirror the fighting in Yugoslavia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45s</td>
<td>A jet streaks across the black sky, leaving twin trails of fire behind it. The KGUN-9 logo rests in the right bottom corner. Across the bottom of the screen is a white banner reading, in black letters, &quot;Kosovo&quot; (left of center). To the left of this, in the bottom left corner, is a tiny red map of Kosovo with the words &quot;Kosovo Crisis&quot; superimposed upon it in yellow letters. Next, footage of five soldiers walking across a field is shown. They are silhouetted against the sky, carrying packs on their backs and rifles in their hands. This scene is replaced by film of a dingy, gray city-scape. Building, partially hidden by trees, can be seen in both the foreground and background. Smoke, either from chimneys or from war, drifts across the scene.</td>
<td>The whine of a jet engine abruptly begins. Vo: &quot;As in Vietnam, American forces are facing hardened, experienced troops protecting their homeland.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-49s</td>
<td>Denny Evans sits center screen, visible from mid-chest up. He speaks to the reporter off screen, just to the left of the camera.</td>
<td>Denny Evans: &quot;We'll be going in there and fighting in their own back yard and they're gonna protect it, they're going to</td>
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</table>
50-77 seconds | A young Hispanic reporter sits to the left of a video screen and various electronic equipment. As she speaks, the camera zooms in on the video monitor until its screen fills the picture. The scene is, perhaps, the same city shown earlier. Buildings are scattered across a mountaineous, rugged landscape. Smoke drifts across the screen. Bare trees dominate the foreground; a tall mountain fills most of the background, seen only as a hulking shadow. Other images appear on screen as the reporter continues to speak: Smoking rubble that was once a home, black and white footage from a smart bomb, a building engulfed in flames that are being sprayed by a lone fireman holding a spurting hose. As we watch the fireman, Tammy Vigil's voice is replaced by Denny Evans'.

78-89 seconds | The fireman continues to battle the inferno before him. Switch to a scene of refugees huddled in a dim room, sitting on couches and on the floor. Some hide their faces from the camera. Some stare straight ahead. Return to torso/head shot of Denny Evans.

90-98 seconds | A photograph fills the screen, presumably from the stack Denny was examining earlier. In the first photo, six young men pose for the camera. Three are white and three are Black; all are dressed in green fatigues. Two sandbagged bunkers are visible in the background, as are two more soldiers (one,
possibly, with a radio on his back). The second photo shows a series of bunkers in the foreground, a helicopter in the near background. Men are loading or unloading the helicopter. Rifles, tarps, and other gear is strewn about. The third photograph is black and white. In it a young man leans against the sunken door to a bunker. Dressed in fatigues, a cigarette is in his right hand and his left is on his hip. He looks blankly towards the camera.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98-112 seconds</td>
<td>Switch to closeup of Denny Evans. His face fills the screen now, with only a small portion of his neck and shoulders visible. As he speaks he becomes visibly shaken. His eyes fill with tears, his lips quiver, and he finally looks away from the camera. He can barely speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113-114 seconds</td>
<td>Denny Evans: “It’s scary to think about more US troops having to... get killed. I don’t want to see it happen.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>115-127 seconds</td>
<td>Colleen Bagnall sits in the studio, visible from mid-torso up. She looks directly into the camera. Video monitors are visible in the background, although the scenes on them are too blurred to be made out.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colleen Bagnall: “Denny Evans says whatever happens with the Kosovo Crisis, he still supports our troops 100%, and he hopes all of us will. He says the lack of support is what hurt so many Vietnam veterans.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Images</td>
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<td>00-14 seconds</td>
<td>Interior shot of the ABC newsroom. Peter Jennings sits center-screen, visible only from mid-chest up. He wears a dark suit and tie with a white shirt. In the background, other people busily work at their desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-35 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior shot. Bill Clinton and daughter Chelsea, both dressed in black, descend the steps of Air Force One. At the base of the stairs, Chelsea draws back slightly, and President Clinton advances into a group of Vietnamese officials. He shakes hands with one unidentified Vietnamese man and accepts a bouquet of flowers from a Vietnamese woman wearing a pink dress. The flowers are immediately whisked away by several Vietnamese men. As the scene fades, Pres. Clinton continues smiling and shaking hands with various Vietnamese men, all dressed in dark suits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-50 seconds</td>
<td>Exterior shot. Dense jungle, seen from far above, fills the screen. Airplanes cross the view, trailing a misty spray. The footage is blurry, and no clear markings can be seen on the, presumably, US war planes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-57 seconds</td>
<td>A globe appears with the United States outlined in black. The globe turns, moving the view across the Pacific ocean to southeast Asia. Vietnam is highlighted and clearly labeled, as is the city of Tay Ninh, which is clearly marked with a glowing-white dot. Thailand, Cambodia, and the South China Sea are also labeled.</td>
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<tr>
<td>58-78 seconds</td>
<td>Interior shot, taken through a window. A Vietnamese child swings rapidly back and forth in a hammock as a woman sings to him. Fade to an exterior shot. A tall Vietnamese man with gray hair, perhaps in his late 40s or 50s, strides down a village street. As he stands in a grove of trees next to the ABC reporter, the scene fades again. A black and white film of a US plane spraying the Vietnamese jungle appears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79-107 seconds</td>
<td>Interior picture of a hospital. The camera focuses closely on the deformed legs of a Vietnamese youth, slowly panning up to his face. He shakes and jerks, and his mannerisms suggest severe physical and possibly mental handicaps. A middle-aged woman behind the boy tries to soothe him. Fade to young children eating and playing. All appear physically handicapped, some apparently able to stand only with mechanical aids. The camera dwells on the vacant face of a toddler, his body propped up by a metal sleeve around his legs and torso. Fade from a picture of a toddler rolling onto his side to an exterior shot of a rice paddy. Vietnamese farmers and their water buffalo work in the mud. Fade to interior shot of two young Vietnamese, a man and woman, and their children, an</td>
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108-147 seconds

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Speech</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interior shot. A Vietnamese man with gray hair, wearing a white shirt and dark sweater, speaks directly to the camera, pointing with his left hand to emphasize his words. The camera pans around the office, showing large binders filled with papers and pictures of Vietnamese poisoned by Agent Orange. Fade to file footage of a young US soldier filling a tank with a large hose. Fade to footage of US soldiers in a jeep spraying the foliage around them with a white mist. Fade to a view from directly behind a sprayer; herbicide mists outwards from the camera’s point of view, settling onto the foliage. Fade to footage of a helicopter flying above a jungle, trailing a misty spray. Fade to footage of planes spraying the jungle beneath them. Fade to footage of a devastated landscape where all plantlife has been destroyed, leaving only vile looking mud. Fade to an interior shot of a Vietnamese nurse working with a tiny child. Fade to a shot of a hospital hallway. Eight or more children move rapidly towards the camera: one, on crutches, has only one leg; two walk on stumps that end above the knee.</td>
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</table>
| Unidentified elderly Asian man: “I do believe that the United States has a moral responsibility...”  
Lidcey: “A moral responsibility says Lei Khou Dai, head of Vietnam’s research on Agent Orange. He argues that because the US already gives compensation to thousands of American GIs who handled Agent Orange and have suffered health problems, the US certainly should offer compensation for the Vietnamese. Vietnam has asked for help with scientific research, the cleanup of contaminated areas, and aid for the care of victims. But the US has been reluctant, saying that there is still no firm scientific evidence that these terrible afflictions were caused by Agent Orange.” |

148-162 seconds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Speech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interior shot. An American in a dark blue suit, light blue shirt, and green/brown tie speaks directly to the camera. A corner of</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unidentified Caucasian man: “No one knows. It just</td>
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the American flag is visible over his left shoulder. The camera pulls back to a point where it looks over the interviewer’s right shoulder, showing all of the American man’s body as he sits upon a red chair. Switch to a shot over the subject’s shoulder, showing the reporter. He wears a dark blue suit coat and light blue shirt; he fiddles with a pen that he holds before him. Return to a closeup of the subject of the interview, tight on his face, with the corner of a flag still visible over his left shoulder.

Litkey: “American ambassador Pete Peterson says Washington is now prepared to join Vietnam in scientific research.” Peterson: “Given time, I think we’re going to be able to come to a conclusion.”

163-189 seconds

Fade to an interior shot of a hospital. A young girl labors up a flight of stairs—the camera rests at the top—with a young girl holding her right hand and helping her along. Her face is sad and pained, contrasting with the red and white stripes of her shirt and pants. Fade to an exterior shot of a Vietnamese man working a rice paddy behind a water buffalo. Another crouches on his/her haunches, perhaps picking something. The foreground is mud; the background is filled by lush green jungle. Fade to a shot of Dr. Dong, the tall Vietnamese man from an earlier shot, standing before a young mother who holds her badly crippled child. The child’s arm is twisted, and the doctor lightly grasps the boy’s hand. The child’s head lolls back, and his face bears the stamp of a terrible physical and mental disability. The camera focuses closely on his face then fades to a shot of a child’s feet, crippled and twisted, standing on a linoleum floor. The child, visible only from the knees down, seems to be struggling to walk, dragging each step painfully along. Fade to the ABC newsroom.

Litkey: “But over time, both sides know, it may be tougher to prove a connection, especially since the tropical climate here has flushed much of the Agent Orange residue out of the soil. Flushed out of the soil, but not out of the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese. Twenty-five years after the end of the war, Dr. Winh Dong and many others here believe Vietnam is still paying a terrible price. Mark Litkey, ABC News, Tay Ninh province.”

190-205 seconds

Peter Jennings sits center-screen, dominating the picture, visible from mid-chest up.

Jennings: “None of the Vietnam veterans groups here have official positions on compensation for the
Vietnamese. The American Legion said it would be more inclined to support it if the Vietnamese government fully accounted for US servicemen still listed as Missing in Action."
WORKS CITED


